

International VIEWPOINT

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International VIEWPOINT

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Landscape before a battle

THE historic all-union referendum on March 17, in which 76% of the 80% turnout voted in favour of keeping the Soviet Union together as a "renewed federation of sovereign republics", now increasingly looks like a pyrrhic victory for Gorbachev and the Kremlin leadership. In the aftermath of the referendum the challenges to the central bureaucracy have been mounting rapidly with the democratic movement, dominated by followers of Boris Yeltsin, gaining renewed momentum, the miners' strike now entering its fifth week and the price rises, which took effect on April 2, likely to dramatically sharpen the confrontations in Soviet society.

Gorbachev escaped a humiliating defeat in the referendum, but a close look at the circumstances surrounding the vote, as well as a more detailed break-down of the results, reveals the fragility of the yes-vote.

POUL FUNDER LARSEN

PRIOR to the referendum there had been a long period of manoeuvring among the different factions of the bureaucracy, in the centre and in the republics, to secure the maximum support for the proposal. The first draft of a new union treaty (replacing the one from 1922) was published last November and debated at the Congress of People's Deputies in December. Further negotiations between the majority of the republics and the centre secured for the latter some concessions in the version drafted shortly before the vote (March 6).

This draft included the right for republics independently to establish direct diplomatic relations and trade relations with other states, and a rather vague statement on the right of the republics to leave the union.¹

The draft also made some concessions on another major disputed point, the right of the republics to dispose of their own natural resources and land. But the main thrust of the proposed treaty remained the maintenance of a strong centre deciding on a series of vital matters, including defence and security, foreign policy and foreign trade relations, strategic choices on economic development and the control of decisive economic sectors.

Ultimately this was not acceptable to six republics with strong national move-

ments opting for independence, and therefore the Baltic Republics (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), Moldavia, Armenia and Georgia stayed out. Efforts by the Soviet authorities to carry through polling in these republics did not meet with much success — mobilizing some hundred thousand Russians (many of them connected to the Soviet army) in the Baltic States and far less in Transcaucasia.²

Strong will to break with Union

Independent referenda carried out in the Baltic States prior to March 17 and in Georgia on March 31 confirmed the strong will in these republics to break away from the Union. A perspective which, in the case of the Baltic States, was supported by a not insignificant number of Russians living in those republics. Armenia has scheduled its own referendum for September 21, while Moldavia has not yet arrived at a decision.

In the weeks preceding the referendum the central Soviet media launched a strong campaign for a yes vote. This drive featured a variety of both liberal and nationalist themes. For example, on the eve of the referendum (March 16) *Pravda* carried on its front page a long appeal by liberal favourite Alexander Yakovlev supporting a yes, while Gorbachev



chev in his TV speech the day before struck the chauvinist chord in calling for "the preservation of the unity of our thousand-year-old state" and citing the instance of Yaroslav the Wise, a Russian knight from the 11th century.

This plunge into Great Russian imperial rhetoric is not likely to have had a decisive effect, given the widespread scepticism towards Gorbachev and the general understanding among the Russian population for the demands of, for example, the Baltic Republics, but it is nonetheless an illustration of one option open to parts of the bureaucracy facing increasing pressure.³

The strongest "yes" came from the Central Asian republics, with 93 to 98% in favour of the Union on turnouts around 90%. This was based on fears that a dissolution of the Union would leave them alone with enormous social and ecological problems, and condemn them into sinking into a third world position.⁴ But also conservative Byelorussia, Azerbaijan

1. But Anatoly Lukyanov, chairman of the Supreme Soviet, ruled out the possibility of a republic seceding from the Union through a simple "no" vote in the March 17 referendum (*Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, March 13, 1991).

2. On March 17, some 250,000 people participated in the referendum in Estonia and around half a million each in Latvia and Lithuania. The exact number of Soviet military personnel in the Baltic States is unknown, but estimates run around 700,000.

3. Another instance of this appeal to Great Russian chauvinism was given by the chairman of the conservative Russian Communist Party, Ivan Poloskov, who at the March 6 plenary meeting of the RCP declared: "Doubt is arising about the future of our fatherland, as to whether its thousand year old history will continue."

4. This is already partially the case. The national income per head is 2593 rubles in Russia, 1580 in Kazakhstan and 1008 in Tadjikistan (*Ekonomika i Zhizn'*, 7/1991).

and rural areas of the Russian Federation and (eastern) Ukraine came out clearly in favour of the Union. However, in a series of the big cities and major industrial centres, the proposal was rejected or only carried by unconvincing margins.

Some results could hardly be seen as anything other than votes of no confidence in Gorbachev. In Sverdlovsk, the third biggest city in the Russian Federation, only 37.6% voted in favour of the Union, and in the Ukraine the yes votes were outnumbered both in the capital Kiev (44%) and in Lvov in western Ukraine (16.4%). In the Kusbass mining area in Siberia, 60% voted yes, but on a turnout of 67%. The overall tendency within the big cities seems to be that the workers — particularly hard hit by the current crisis — voted against the Union or simply stayed away.

After the referendum there are differing opinions within the leading circles of the bureaucracy on how to build the "renewed federation". In an interview shortly after the vote, Gorbachev left a door open to possible independence for at least some of the rebellious republics, citing the example of eastern Europe and the "principle of freedom of choice", but went on to say: "we have constitutional mechanisms for the secession of republics from the Union. Personally, I would favour their self-determination within a renewed federation — a union of sovereign states."⁵

Re-building the Union from below

Certain key figures, including the influential president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nasarbajev, have been promoting the concept of re-building a new Union "from below". That is, a Union which would begin by including the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Byelorussian and the Central Asian republics. But given the centrifugal forces at work in Soviet society in general, and the strong pro-independence tendencies in, for example, western Ukraine, which delivered a resounding no to the Union on March 17, this is hardly a miracle cure.

Other voices have not surprisingly been calling for Gorbachev to take maximum advantage of his "victory" and use it to apply the iron fist. The hardliner Colonel Nikolai Petrushenko put this bluntly: "The referendum has given Gorbachev a mandate for bold, determined and consistent action against separatist and nationalist forces. History won't forgive him if he doesn't use this opportunity."

The period following Gorbachev's conservative turn last autumn and particularly the months after the attacks in Riga and Vilnius this January, has seen a revival of democratic mass mobilizations in the Russian Federation. The huge demonstrations in Moscow and several other cities on March 10 directed against the draft

Union treaty and Gorbachev, and the hundred thousand people who took to the streets in Moscow on March 28, in spite of the threat of a severe crackdown, bears witness to that.

Though the liberals, spearheaded by Yeltsin, are still leading the movement, signs of the fragility of this coalition are multiplying. While in the media Yeltsin has been going on the offensive with a series of strong attacks on Gorbachev, and still retains strong popular support, his political base could rapidly erode due to growing fissures in the democratic movement.

Yeltsin, who left the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) at its 28th Congress last summer, is now clearly opting for the formation of a new party to consolidate his position. Such a move would, by all accounts, create deep divisions within the ranks of the democratic movement, where numerous parties have been founded, none of which has so far been able to establish itself as a major force (although Nikolai Travkin's Russian Democratic Party is still the strongest).

Unimpressive record of Russian parliament

The achievements of the Russian parliament, Yeltsin's stronghold, could not be characterized as impressive, serving largely as a podium for the liberals, but without real powers to implement policy.⁶ The city councils where the democrats won the majority last year (as in Moscow and Leningrad) are facing the same problem, which could increasingly weaken the credibility of the whole liberal project.

In the referendum held in the Russian Federation at the same time as the all-Union one on the question of a directly elected Russian president, the Yeltsinites won a comfortable, but not immense majority of 70%. However this proposal was blocked by the Russian Congress of People's Deputies at the end of March. Practically, the situation inside the Russian parliament seems to have reached a stalemate — with Yeltsin and his supporters unable to rule and the Communist faction, for numerical and political reasons, unable to topple Yeltsin.

At the same time the centre, and its "super-President" Gorbachev, armed with numerous and far-reaching powers, is itself disunited and in a state of confusion. Outright totalitarian measures such as the ban on all demonstrations in Moscow until April 15 and the call for a suspension of the miners' strike go together with more conciliatory calls for a dialogue from both sides.

It is increasingly clear that neither of the main factions within the bureaucracy is able to mobilize the necessary strength by itself. But the polarization of the liberal and conservative currents within the

bureaucracy has rendered the idea of a compromise (like the "left-centre" alliance championed by Moscow mayor Gavril Popov) obsolete.

However, for the time being, the most serious challenge to Gorbachev comes not from Popov, or Yeltsin, but from the strike of 300,000 miners which started at the beginning of March. A walkout in 18 mines in the Donbass in Ukraine on March 1 was shortly afterwards followed by the Karaganda mines in Kazakhstan and mines in the Rostov area, Vorkuta and the radical Kusbass district in western Siberia.

By March 23 the strike had spread to several other coalfields from Sakhalin in the Far East to Chelyabinsk in the Urals and Inta in the north, with 165 of the country's 600 or so coalmines on strike. A variety of economic and political demands have been put forward by the different mines involved in the struggle, in most places including demands for higher wages and better pensions. Even though miners are better paid than many other workers, social conditions in the mining areas are miserable.

Miners put forward political demands

Other demands being put forward, including calls for a rise in the price of coal, independence of the mines from the state and a transfer of the mines from the Union authorities to the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation (where they would be granted more administrative and economic independence), combine economic and political elements.

The Kusbass miners, followed by other mining areas, are going one step further, stressing explicitly political demands — the de-politicization of the army and the KGB, dissolution of the Supreme Soviet and the resignation of Gorbachev — and calling for a union-wide political strike to topple Gorbachev and the Pavlov government. This was pinpointed by Vyacheslav Golikov from the Kusbass workers' committees: "The Soviet government is trying to portray our movement as a sausage riot, but our people are not swallowing the bait. We don't need a piece of bread, we need a change in the political system so we can earn our bread independently. Our demands are political demands."⁷

This amounted to a rejection of the "relief package" for the mining areas offered by vice-president Yanayev on March 14, consisting of additional funds for developing infrastructure, housing and culture in the regions as well as food

5. *Pravda*, March 18, 1991.

6. One instance of the dilletantism and corruption prevailing in the Russian parliament is the recent resignation of the liberal vice-premier, Genadii Filysin; Filysin was, together with other ministers, involved in highly dubious transactions to buy 7.8 billion dollars for 140 billion rubles. When the aborted deal was disclosed the parliament decided to sack Filysin.

7. *The Independent*, March 20, 1991.

and medicines. But the miners have learned the lessons of the strike in 1989 where many of the agreements made with the government under "decision no. 608", which ended the strike, were never fulfilled.

During the strike the miners have taken on a series of responsibilities in the coal-mining areas, holding public meetings and demonstrations, organizing shifts to keep the mines tidy and setting up teams to keep order in collaboration with the local militia. A union-wide coordination of the struggle has been set up with the different strike committees and the independent miners union participating.

On March 26 the Supreme Soviet demanded that the strike should be suspended for two months but couldn't reach an agreement on how to punish the miners if they did not comply with this decision. However in some of the mining areas, including Kusbass, Donbass and Karaganda, the local mining authorities have demanded that miners pay the losses inflicted on the mines by the strike. It seems at the moment unlikely that the central bureaucracy can break the strike by force, since this would create political uproar and probably a general strike. Therefore the apparatus, also under strong pressure from the Yeltsinites, are trying to apply a carefully balanced carrot and stick policy.

Miners leaders closely tied to liberals

As in 1989 the strike has received wide support, with people and workers groups from across the Union sending statements of support and different forms of material and economic aid. But the political limitations of the central leadership of the miners constitute a serious obstacle to a broadening of the movement and a link-up with other workers. The Kusbass leaders are closely tied in with the liberals around Yeltsin, who are trying to use the strike in their bid for power, and are therefore ready to subordinate the strike to the project of "Democratic Russia".

On March 21, the central Soviet press published the details of the price rises to take effect on April 2. The whole scenario of these price rises gives a sense of déjà vu on last summer, when the Ryzhkov government announced similar intentions creating panic buying and protests, which in the end forced them to withdraw the plan. But this time the government applied a more carefully prepared tactic, paying out compensation in advance to the different affected groups, cutting taxes and granting an extra 40% on bank accounts.

Nominally these compensations should account for 85% of the price rises. However, the draconian rises (between 150 and 300% on a series of goods, including basic food, consumer goods, clothing and public transportation) would over a short

period eat up the compensations and dramatically lower the living standards of much of the population. It will have a particularly disastrous impact on the estimated 70 million Soviet citizens living on around 100 rubles a month, including pensioners, students, women on maternity leave and some white-collar workers. The immediate reaction until now has been one of confusion and despair, with people hoarding big amounts of cheap goods, but the measures could spark off open rebellion against the government.

One of the main aims of the reforms, from the government's point of view, is to reduce the state budget deficit by cutting back on subsidies and to seize some of the "excess money" in people's pockets. The economic consequences of the price rises are largely unpredictable given the general decay of the economy — GNP fell by 2% last year and an 11% slump is predicted for this year — but there is likely to be a boost to the inflationary spiral which is already hitting consumers through the food markets and the shadow economy.

To avoid organized protests against this attack on living standards, Gorbachev has resorted to authoritarian methods, introducing joint patrols by army and militia in the main cities earlier this year and banning all demonstrations in Moscow for three weeks. The liberals, headed by Yeltsin and Popov, have been criticizing the decision to raise prices in this fashion — they would prefer to implement their own free market recipe — but have not tried to organize action against it. The Moscow left, which does not have a mass following in any way comparable to that of the liberals, has been trying to organize activities to protest against the price reform. On April 1 a happening on the streets against the measures ended in arrests by the police. Some of the participants were fined.

Yeltsin's fragile alliance

After the momentous developments of the last few weeks the situation in the Soviet Union has reached a fever pitch, with the popular support for the Gorbachev leadership hitting an all-time low. At such a time the absence of a mass opposition truly independent from the two main factions of the bureaucracy becomes ever more strongly felt. The protests against the country's political leadership and the disastrous social and economic consequences of its reforms could combine in a strong dynamic that would be able to sweep Gorbachev away and create a split in the fragile alliance around Yeltsin.

For the time being only the miners have the strength to initiate such a process, but this would require a break with Yeltsin and his supporters, who are now aiming for power, to carry through their own pro-capitalist project. ★

Youth rebel against Milosevic

MOUNTING gloom about the ability of Yugoslavia to survive as an integral state was suddenly pierced by a ray of light in March 1991, with massive demonstrations against the hardline regime in Serbia, Yugoslavia's largest republic. Called originally by opposition parties to protest against the ruling party's iron control over the local mass media, the first demonstration on March 9 was met with the full array of instruments of riot control: water cannon, tear gas, mounted police, dogs, rubber bullets and finally live ammunition.

MICHELE LEE

BY the end of the day, two people had been killed and army tanks made their appearance on Belgrade's streets. The following day, tens of thousands of young people demonstrated in Serbia's key towns, leading to a four-day occupation of the main square in Belgrade. The target of their anger was the government and republican president, Slobodan Milosevic, whom the crowd likened to Saddam Hussein. One hundred days after its overwhelming victory in the first multiparty elections since the war, the legitimacy of the ruling party — the Socialist Party (formerly League of Communists) of Serbia (SPS) — was thus dramatically brought into question.

Involving a multitude of young people and several university centres, the demonstrations expressed the clear repudiation by Serbia's younger generation of the policies of national hatred pursued by Milosevic over the past four years. The spontaneous eruption of Serbia's youth into national politics has put paid to Milosevic's claim to speak for Serbia far more effectively than all the combined efforts of the opposition parties. The appearance of the army on Belgrade streets said it all: Milosevic is the first republican leader in Yugoslavia's postwar history to have requested military intervention in defence of domestic "law and order".

The ground for the March events was prepared by a widespread sense of disap-

5

In the Yugoslav federation there are:

Six republics

Serbia: 86,361 km²; 9.9 million inhabitants, of which 66.4% Serbs, 19.4% Albanians and 2.3% Croats. Capital: Belgrade (also the federal capital).

Slovenia: 20,251 km²; 1.9 million inhabitants, of which 90.5% Slovenes, 2.2% Serbs and 2.9% Croats. Capital: Ljubljana.

Croatia: 55,538 km²; 4.6 million inhabitants, of which 75.1% Croats, 11.5% Serbs. Capital: Zagreb.

Bosnia-Herzegovina: 51,129 km²; 4.4 million inhabitants, of which 39.2% Muslims, 32.2% Serbs and 18.4% Croats. Capital: Sarajevo.

Macedonia: 25,713 km²; 1.9 million inhabitants, of which 67% Macedonians, 19.6% Albanians and 2.3% Serbs. Capital: Skopje.

Montenegro: 13,812 km²; 632,000 inhabitants, of which 68.5% Montenegrins, 13.4% Muslims, 6.5% Albanians and 3.3% Serbs. Capital: Titograd.

Two autonomous provinces (within Serbia)

Kosovo: 10,887 km²; 2 million inhabitants of which 90% Albanians. Capital: Pristina.

Vojvodina: 21,506 km²; more than 2 million inhabitants, of which 55.8% Serbs and 21.7% Hungarians. Capital: Novi Sad. ★

pointment with Milosevic's betrayal of his electoral promises, chief among them a commitment to protect the population's living standards and work for a peaceful resolution of the Yugoslav crisis. Three months after the elections, half of Serbia's workforce remains unpaid; old-age pensioners and workplace invalids have not received their pensions; and Milosevic's hardline stance in negotiations with the other republics has brought the country to the brink of civil war. As a student delegate told Milosevic: "Never before has Serbia been so isolated, so much hated, its international prestige so low."

The March demonstrations mark a watershed in Yugoslav politics, giving rise to fresh hope that differences regarding the country's future will be resolved by negotiations rather than force. For this to happen, though, Milosevic must go. This can only be achieved by the citizens of Serbia themselves.

A petition demanding his resignation has been circulated in Serbia, and it is highly significant that the Serbian intelligentsia, which contributed so much to Milosevic's rise to power and only months, indeed weeks, ago was still hailing him as the saviour of the Serb nation, should now have sided overwhelmingly with the young demonstrators and trodden the path to its Canossa in Belgrade's Republic Square.

The parties of the opposition have hitherto shied away from challenging Milosevic's aggressive and ultimately

unrealistic national programme, thereby contributing to their own political (and electoral) marginalization. Now, however, in the words of a Serbia human rights activist: "the students have proved that it is not freedom (*sloboda* in Serbian) and Serbia which are mutually exclusive, but rather freedom and *Slobodan*."

On hearing the students declare the Serbian emperor naked, the rest of Yugoslavia heaved a sigh of relief. It will be difficult for the Belgrade media to argue henceforth that Milosevic's opponents are automatically enemies of Serbia. By rejecting the identification between Milosevic and the Serb nation, the students have raised the hope in other parts of Yugoslavia that their representatives can negotiate with Serbia without being constantly subjected to ultimatums, demands for unconditional surrender, and threats of civil war or military intervention.

The immediate condemnation by most of the other republics of the use of violence against demonstrators, and especially of the army's involvement, gave the lie to Milosevic's favourite demagogic device: the claim that all other Yugoslavs — and much of the world besides — are joined in an anti-Serb plot. The chief plotter against the nation's freedom turned out to be none other than the republic's own president! Serbia's young people have thus emerged as a key protagonist of Yugoslavia's unity.

Fresh elections needed

The way forward must lie in fresh elections in Serbia. Milosevic's charisma as an undisputed national leader, created and maintained by his control over the mass media, has been a key instrument of his party's electoral victory. Thanks to the students' action, this control is now weakening. Nor will Milosevic be able in future to rely on the federal army, for the army has vowed to remain henceforth outside the political fracas. This does not mean that Milosevic's regime will give up without a fight. It will create its own military forces and continue to play the nationalist card. It will also seek to dismantle the remaining federal institutions — the collective presidency, the government and the army — threatening to bring Yugoslavia down with itself.

The young demonstrators, on the other hand, have given a mandate to the Serbian opposition parties to articulate a programme based not on confrontation, but on cooperation with Yugoslavia's other nationalities. It remains to be seen whether the opposition is capable of assuming

this historic responsibility. Much will depend also on whether the political parties in the rest of Yugoslavia will be able to grasp the importance of what happened in Serbia during the March days, and make an adequate response.

"Civil war? We leave that to the older generation" one Belgrade student told a German television crew. He was speaking at that moment for all the young people of Yugoslavia — politically marginalized, largely unemployed and overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the options on offer from their elders. His words hold a particular poignancy for the Albanians of Kosovo, who, thanks to Milosevic, have for two years now been having a taste of something very close to civil war.

In the mass media of western Europe, the potential for civil war in Yugoslavia is ascribed variously to its multi-ethnic makeup; to the differing cultural traditions of "Mitteleuropa" and the Ottoman Empire; to memories of the atrocities committed by local Nazi collaborators during World War Two; to a struggle between the remnants of Communism and a new anti-Communist majority. All these factors are present, but they do not play more than a marginal role.

Creation of Greater Serbia

If civil war does come to Yugoslavia, it will be through attempts to alter existing borders by force. Milosevic has made it absolutely clear (as recently as March 28, at a meeting of republican heads of state) that if the other republics persist in their plans for a confederal Yugoslavia, he will seek the creation of a greater Serbia — that is, a state embracing all Serbs living in Yugoslavia.

This implies the disappearance of Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina and the amputation of a substantial part of Croatia. It is likely that Macedonia also would be a victim. From the national point of view, such a state would be an absurdity, since within it Serbs would not even command a numerical majority.

This has not prevented Milosevic from encouraging militant Serb nationalists in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to form National Councils with the aim of annexing these territories to Serbia. At the end of March, such a Council in Croatia announced the secession of a self-proclaimed "Autonomous Province of Krajina" (an area embracing only a minority of Serbs in Croatia, along with a considerable number of Croats) and its adhesion to Serbia.

It is worth spelling out why such acts can only lead to war. During the Second World War, Yugoslav Communists were able to organize a mass anti-Nazi resistance, and also win the civil war, primarily because they understood that the aspirations of the country's diverse nationalities could only be satisfied by their acquiring their own states within the new Yugosla-

via. This was the basis for the federal organization of the postwar state: six republics and two provinces (see box).

The formula ensured national peace for almost half a century. The borders of these federal units are thus not administrative, but deeply national and political. They do not coincide with ethnic borders, nor could they do so; they separate many Croats, Serbs, Muslims and Albanians from their mother republic/province. But international borders too in many parts of Europe do not follow ethnic boundaries. The key point is that these frontiers — and this holds equally for Yugoslavia — cannot be changed except by agreement, or war.

The first attempt to alter Yugoslavia's internal frontiers came in 1988-89, when Serbia incorporated by force two federal units, Kosovo and Vojvodina, and imposed a puppet administration upon a third, Montenegro. Yugoslavia has not yet recovered from the shock of this aggression, nor will it be able to regain any sta-

bility until it has been rolled back.

The secession of the so-called Krajina — only one day after the conference of republican presidents in the Croatian town of Split — is a fresh attempt to use this method to destroy Yugoslavia from within. Milosevic, by supporting the Krajina leaders, has in effect, declared war on Yugoslavia.

Milosevic has never been interested in a collective agreement. In the past, he has managed to torpedo all efforts to resolve the political crisis by peaceful means, each time upping the stakes in this deadly game with Yugoslavia's future. Now, with time running against him, he is becoming even more dangerous. The adventurist character of his policy was illustrated clearly by the farce — a farce that could easily have turned into tragedy — surrounding the resignation, on March 15, of Borisav Jovic, chairman of the Yugoslav state presidency, from that body.

The Serbian intellectuals' appeal

ONLY three months after his election to the post of President of the republic, Slobodan Milosevic has lost the confidence of the people.

The whole world, all the Yugoslav republics and peoples (with the exception of the puppet regime in Montenegro) and finally now also Serbia and its youth have come out against Milosevic's Serbia. His skill in acquiring enemies has brought Serbia to the very brink of civil war.

The crude and violent manipulation of Serbian public opinion could no longer cover up these facts. The arrogance and scorn with which Slobodan Milosevic has treated everyone, including his own people, reached their peak on March 9 when he ordered an attack on Serb people, when human lives were lost, and when torture was used against imprisoned Serb youth.

Having failed to persuade the army to introduce a state of emergency in Yugoslavia, the purpose of which could only be the preservation of his personal rule, Milosevic went on to destroy the Presidency of Yugoslavia, thus foreclosing the last possibility of a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

The President of Serbia has chosen the politics of war. The bringing of tanks into the streets and the undermining of any agreement about the future of Yugoslavia testify to an adventurism and selfish egotism which the Serb people can no longer tolerate.

Milosevic cannot implicate the whole of the Serbian nation in the creation of enemies for which his despotism has been responsible.

The Serb people is no longer willing to allow Slobodan Milosevic to keep it in isolation, to feed it with lies, to beat it and burden it with historic mortgages.

Speaking in the interest of all citizens of Serbia, we demand of Slobodan Milosevic that he immediately resign his post.

(This public appeal is dated March 17, 1991. It was published in the Independent Belgrade weekly, Vreme on March 25, 1991) ★

President resigns

With demonstrators' shouts still ringing in his ears, Milosevic tried to push the presidency into allowing the introduction of a state of emergency throughout Yugoslavia. When he failed to win a majority for this, he engineered Jovic's resignation as well as that of the representatives of Vojvodina and Montenegro. The Kosovo representative, having sided with the majority, was promptly (and unconstitutionally) dismissed by the Serbian Assembly. The elimination of four out of eight members of the Federal Presidency not only made the collective head of state impotent, it also left the army without a functioning commander-in-chief.

Jovic's act was unprecedented in Yugoslavia's modern history, causing a severe constitutional crisis. Neither the Federal Presidency, nor the Serbian Assembly, nor the relevant bodies in other republics and provinces, were informed of this decision before it was made public. He subsequently justified his resignation on the grounds that the current relationship of forces on the Presidency "supports the break up of the country", taking the opportunity also to launch a violent attack on Ante Markovic, the federal prime minister, whom he accused of being an agent of

foreign governments.

In a dramatic address to the nation following Jovic's resignation, Milosevic announced that Serbia would no longer obey the Federal Presidency; that he himself, as president of Serbia, would have nothing to do with it; and that he was organizing police reservists to prevent alleged rebellions in Kosovo and the Muslim-inhabited south-west of Serbia. He concluded his speech by calling upon the "imperilled Serb nation" to unite behind him. The Serbian prime minister brought up the rear by informing the Serbian Assembly of an impending attack by the Croatian and Bosnian authorities on Serb-inhabited towns — a piece of misinformation which he subsequently had to retract.

Milosevic's attempt to undermine collective federal bodies, did not, however, succeed. Five days later, on March 21, Jovic simply rescinded his resignation and returned to his presidential post without any explanation; the vassal provinces and Montenegro trailed behind. Nevertheless, the eruption of this unforeseen constitutional crisis had been sufficient to shift public attention away from the demonstrations that had taken place in Serbia, and to the even more urgent issue of who — if anybody — rules Yugoslavia.

The secession of the so-called Krajina from Croatia is intended to serve the same purpose; to provide Milosevic with extra time — even at the price of civil war. It has already cost three lives; traffic between the coast and the interior has again been interrupted; tourism — on which Yugoslavia vitally depends for its foreign currency — has been dealt a mortal blow.

By deploying its tanks in a part of the disputed area — Plitvice National Park — the army is back on the streets again. Given Milosevic's warlike stance, and the Croats determination to prevent the break-up of their republic, it is difficult to see how it will be able to return to barracks in the foreseeable future.

These events prove once again that Yugoslavia has no future unless democracy wins in Serbia. This is why the demonstrating Serb youth gave rise to such hopes that peace would prevail. In the last two weeks of March thousands of Serbian citizens signed the petition demanding Milosevic's resignation (see box).

The main message of the March demonstrations was: give peace a chance. The Serb youth, however, in its majority, owes loyalty to no particular party in Serbia. The vast majority of the opposition parties have been so complicit with Milosevic's nationalist programme that is difficult to see how they can offer the youth the positive alternative it seeks. Until such an alternative is articulated, Serbia will remain a menace to the rest of the country. Yugoslavia as a political, economic and cultural space will continue to crumble, tottering between hope and the threat of civil war. ★

The bubble bursts

NOBODY will be worse off, and most will be better off: this was the claim of Federal German Chancellor Helmut Kohl when East Germany was annexed by West Germany. And almost everybody believed him. Kohl's election campaign tour on behalf of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) at the start of March 1990 was a triumphal procession. Over half a million people came out to welcome him at half a dozen rallies, brandishing placards with the message "Helmut, take us by the hand, and lead us to economic miracle land".

This took place in the old strongholds of the workers' movement — Leipzig, Erfurt, Cottbus. Two thirds of the working class voted for Kohl's party. In spite of growing skepticism, the West German government parties maintained their support in the east in the elections last December, gaining 58% of the votes.

HANS-JÜRGEN SCHULZ

AS so often this was a vote against their own interests. The annexation by capitalist West Germany has had catastrophic consequences. West German products flooded into the ex-GDR and wiped out locally produced goods. Exports to the Soviet bloc (some 70% of GDR exports) also collapsed, since these now have to be paid for in hard currency, while, apart from raw materials, the GDR no longer wants to import Soviet bloc goods. East German industrial production has fallen by more than a half and national income fell by 22% in 1990. Within months more than a million jobs disappeared.

Until now, the social consequences have been concealed by massive subsidies. Older people have been pensioned off, and women have been given cash to return to the home. Many nurseries have been closed. This has made it possible to claim that "only" 760,000 people (9% of the workforce) are really out of work. Some 1.9 million are on short time-work-

ing, getting 90% of their old income, even though they often have nothing to do. 700,000 public employees have been laid off, on 70% of their income. Thus open and concealed unemployment affects 40% of the workforce. But most saw this as a temporary problem of transition. Some were positively thankful. The lower income could be supplemented by savings, and the free time used for travel.

However many are now beginning to realize that the road is leading not to economic miracle land but to poverty. The first closures of enterprises are now taking place, and most of the others face a bleak future. Paid leave will, this summer, turn into mass unemployment.

At the beginning of February the truth struck people and the popular mood changed. Dull resignation and hopelessness, but also outbursts of aggression. Many people — and two thirds of the youth — no longer have any intention of voting. According to polls, the CDU has lost a fifth of its support (from 42 to 34%), to the benefit of the Social

Democrats (SPD), whose support has risen from 22 to 33%. The far right Republicans have also made gains, and xenophobic and openly fascist trends have appeared.

Mass layoffs announced

However, when the threat became immediate, and the first mass lay-offs and enterprise closures were announced, the reaction began. When it became known that the workforce at Jena's Carl Zeiss factory was to be reduced from 29,000 to 5,000, some 20,000 demonstrated in the streets. In Erfurt the number of protesters may have reached 50,000. There, as in Neurippin and other small towns, workplace occupations took place.

These actions were usually taken on the initiative of the workers' councils, even if often with trade union support. In Germany these bodies are elected by the workforce to represent their social interests. The elections mainly took place last spring. Hence the composition of these councils tends to represent the mood at

that time. They are mostly made up of supporters of the bourgeois parties. Thus the actions have an essentially demonstrative character, even if they reflect a more radical mood.

The trade unions, which are now almost exclusively in the hands of the West German machines, have jumped on the bandwagon, organizing a series of protests. In mid-February 35,000 shipyard workers demonstrated in the Baltic Coast towns. At the start of March 10,000 public employees took part in a protest as part of a wage campaign (transport for 50,000 had been provided). In the Leuna works 20,000 chemical workers demanded the maintenance of their jobs.

At this point an element of spontaneity came into play. On March 11, some 25,000 people, mostly unemployed, demonstrated in Leipzig. It was not by chance that this is the city where the anti-Stalinist demonstrations, which were to spread throughout East Germany, began in autumn 1989. Here the "Alliance '90" (an electoral coalition of the old opposition and the Greens), the churches and the engineering workers' union had issued a call, but this had more of a supportive than an initiating character.

The Leipzig tradition

The Leipzig tradition of Monday demonstrations has thus been resumed. A week later other places followed suit, bringing over 100,000 people onto the streets.

This may be the start of a broad and radicalizing movement. But it is not yet that. In the past five weeks, some 300,000 people have been involved in such actions, above all in the working class centres in Saxony. Until now, there has been no independent organization, or organs of struggle and coordination. The political perspective is limited to protests and appeals to the rulers to finally do something to help.

The transplanted West German trade union machines and the SPD are doing all they can to take the leadership of this movement. This they may well succeed in doing, given the absence of any political alternative and the fact that the PDS (the former GDR Communist Party) plays no role. However the latter has not yet wholly given up — it called a demonstration for March 23 in Berlin, attended by between 30 and 50,000 people. Indeed, if this party is unable to build itself during these struggles it will be definitively isolated from the working class.

Under these conditions some are saying that this broad protest movement promises an eventful, if not a hot, spring. It remains undecided whether these are just impotent protests, which will end in deeper resignation, or the opening act of spontaneous struggles from which a radicalization and self-organization of the working class can come. ★

State capitalism in East Germany

HELMUT KOHL played a leading role in pushing forward the speedy annexation of East Germany for party political reasons. He did this against the will of more far-sighted bourgeois leaders like Alfred Herrhausen, then president of the Deutsche Bank, or Karl Otto Pöhl, head of the central bank, who spoke out in favour of a slower tempo.

Because of his promise to bring quick social prosperity, by means of unification, Kohl was enthusiastically welcomed by East Germans, especially by blue collar workers. Throughout 1990 he made numerous triumphant trips to the East, addressing hundreds of thousands of citizens. But immediately after the annexation he stopped visiting the ex-GDR. Now, three months and one million unemployed later, East German workers are once again demanding an appearance by the "chancellor who brought about German unity". But this time he would meet an audience in a rather different mood...

BJÖRN KRÜGER

BY ACCEPTING the implementation of the "currency union"¹ on July 1, 1990, the GDR government not only ceased to exercise any influence on the amount, price and velocity of its domestic currency but also paved the way for the most brutal "liberalization" programme ever applied to an east European country.

The effects on productivity and employment have been dramatic. While unemployment was something unknown in the former "workers' state", now, of the former nine million workers, 3.7 million are already affected by layoffs. Every third child is growing up in a family with at least one parent unemployed. And there is more to come. Labour minister Norbert Blüm estimates that during the course of this year there will be some additional 550,000 layoffs in the electronics and metal industry, about 600,000 in the administrative apparatus, 160,000 in the chemical and paper industry, 220,000 in mining, 160,000 in textiles and 400,000 in agriculture.² This would mean an unemployment rate of nearly 50%, higher than at the time of the Weimar Republic, during the grave world economic crisis which in Germany led to the rise of Adolf Hitler.³

When the then East German social democratic finance minister Walter Romberg predicted in the summer of 1990 that in the following year the GDR would

have a deficit of 20bn DM, he was immediately fired by the East German premier, de Maizière, for expressing such a gloomy outlook in public.

Huge investments needed

Today, even conservative politicians would be happy if Romberg's forecast were to be confirmed. For this year, the deficit of the "five new states (Länder)" is planned to increase to 50bn DM. But the Brandenburg minister of economics has already estimated that for his region alone 50bn are needed.⁴

The West German bourgeoisie has done everything to help East Germans become dissatisfied. Firstly, in their greed, the western Länder managed to get their eastern counterparts to take only 55 % of their proper share of Value Added Tax (VAT) revenues. Thus, while the eastern Länder are rather poor, "on balance, the Länder (west) even made money out of German unity", as an internal working paper of the finance ministry concluded.

Secondly, Bonn refused to pay the subsidies for housing, electricity and public transport paid by the GDR government in the past⁵, thereby leaving the burden on the shoulders of the East German Länder.

Soon the latter discovered that they did not have enough money to maintain existing services. Cities like Erfurt, Gera,

Halle, Magdeburg or Leipzig were declared by their mayors to be on the verge of bankruptcy. Some even had to cease paying wages to local civil servants. Sensational actions, with hardly any parallel in history, were organized, such as demonstrations by some hundreds of mayors.

Thus, by its very policies, the West German bourgeoisie forced its eastern hangers-on to protest, formally at least, against this type of mistreatment. After all, the CDU won the elections in East Germany because citizens thought it would be the party best suited to facilitate contacts with and investments by big capital.

Pro-Eastern wing in CDU

Quick disappointment was inevitably to follow. It is possible that in the near future a "pro-eastern" wing will emerge in the all-German CDU, claiming to represent the special interests of citizens of the ex-GDR. However, given the total lack of an East German bourgeoisie and the resulting subordination of East Germans inside the CDU, such a current would not have much room for manoeuvre.

1. When the East German currency, the Mark, was abolished and replaced by the West German Deutschmark.

2. Women are increasingly the group most affected. While in January 1990 women made up only 11% of the unemployed, eight months later the figure had risen to 55%, plus a high number of unregistered unemployed. Paradoxically this increase in female unemployment in East Germany is taking place at a time when in the western part of the country the service sector is set to expand.

3. However today, of course, there is a much more developed social security safety net.

4. Kurt Biedenkopf, the conservative prime minister of Saxony, estimates that between 80 and 100bn DM are year are needed. IMF experts have put it at twice that amount.

5. Of the 37bn DM subsidies it pays only 2 billion.



vre, unless it was indirectly supported by strong social pressure from outside.⁶

Very quickly after the annexation, the Bonn government found itself on the defensive. Confronted with mounting criticism it could only chase after events, behaving like the SED (the former ruling Communist party in the GDR) in its last days before losing power. After some harsh behind-the-scenes disputes, fueled by public criticism of its East German Länder prime ministers⁷, the CDU finally decided to go on the offensive. At the beginning of March, it passed the so-called General Eastern Uptum Project (Gemeinschaftswerk Aufschwung Ost), which is to deliver 24bn DM to the newly acquired territories during the next two years to expand public demand and boost public enterprise.

Given the seriousness of the crisis, however, that will hardly do⁸. Moreover a not insignificant part of the money will not find its way to the pockets of East German enterprises, but, without doubt, into the pockets of their western competitors.

Via the *Treuhand* holding company most of the East German means of production are in the hands of the state and are managed in a capitalist manner. East Germany is a state capitalist enclave inside a capitalist society.

Socialization of losses, privatization of profits

Of course, the bourgeoisie intends to change this as fast as possible. As soon as an enterprise becomes profitable it is sold. Non-profitable assets on the other hand remain in the hands of the state, which has to maintain them with public funds. Thus profits are privatized while losses are socialized.⁹

Juridically, East Germany is part of a capitalist country, but socially it desperately lacks significant elements of a stable capitalist society — the bourgeoisie and its consolidated political and state power machinery.

Of course, unlike in the other former "socialist" countries, the tasks of a home-grown bourgeoisie could be simply assumed by the existing West German one. Nonetheless difficulties remain. There is no system of political parties, deeply rooted in different layers of the bourgeoisie, pursuing different priorities, in East Germany. Instead the political regime is based to a high degree on pure ideological loyalty, not on direct material interests. Big swings in public opinion are inevitable, and are, in fact, already happening.

The eastern administrative structure is not one on which the bourgeoisie can totally rely. In the past it was the most privileged and most ideologically safeguarded bastion of the Stalinist regime. It is true that most of the former Stalinists

have no actual problems in being loyal to their new masters, their old "class enemies", except for a defiant minority, which is being systematically witch-hunted. But their financial positions as well as their uncertain future (the plan is to dismiss 700,000 civil servants this year) make them a not wholly reliable tool for the bourgeoisie. Since the latter has not enough money and personnel to renew the whole apparatus with new people, it has to be content with changing the top layers.

But lower down the hierarchy uncertainties remain. When, at the beginning of March, 700 Potsdam police went on a several-day-long warning strike demanding higher wages and better working conditions, they were watched with sympathy by their colleagues throughout the ex-GDR.

Massive public mistrust of police

Building a new secret police is also proving difficult. Only one and a half years after the collapse of the former secret police, the Staatssicherheit (Stasi) — which had been on the verge of launching a bloodbath in Leipzig on October 7, 1989 — memories are still fresh. So far the build-up meets massive (but also passive) public mistrust, because people correctly fear that the secret police can only be maintained by former Stasi members. While the exact picture is not of course clear, it seems that only small progress in developing new structures has been made.

The West German bourgeoisie has only sent second rate personnel to manage the newly acquired territories¹⁰. Preparing for last year's East German elections, lots of politicians came from the West to the country's cities, towns and villages, presenting themselves as candidates for political and state management jobs. Happy to obtain people educated in a market economy and supposedly well-connected with much-needed sources of capital, people were inclined to vote for the western imports.

Thus, the mayors of important cities, such as Dresden, Erfurt and Leipzig, all come from West Germany. But it has become clear that many of the imports

are politicians who had failed in the West, often due to political and economic scandals. Such precedents do not encourage confidence in bourgeois-style politics.

Membership of the CDU and FDP (liberals) in East Germany has already dropped sharply. Until now the political parties have found it difficult to attract members. While the CDU and the FDP have relied on the already existing former "socialist" GDR sister parties, with their functionaries, structures and memberships, the Social Democrats have had to build from scratch, since the party was forcibly integrated into the Communist Party in 1945. Today, the SPD claims 60,000 members in East Germany, but this is probably an exaggeration.

Politics the preserve of a small minority

Thus, in East Germany, as in all the other east European countries, political parties and organized political activity are the preserve of small core groups or networks of fulltimers. This is not only true for the bourgeois parties but for the citizens' movements and socialist forces. Coming at a time of brutal austerity attacks, this expresses a deep distrust of explicitly ideological-based organisms in general, and, after the collapse of "socialism" and the fresh capitalist disaster, a profound demoralization.

Looking at the political map of East Germany, one finds a bourgeoisie — to some degree still "foreign" — in charge of the country, a bourgeoisie which has conquered via the unification a considerable additional geographic and economic potential. At the same time it has got as a bonus a lot of serious problems, including a population in the process of pauperization whose behaviour is unpredictable.

On the other hand there is a working class, which, after 40 years without self-organization and self-consciousness, does not feel itself to be one.

It is only now, under the immense austerity attacks, that it is taking a few steps in that direction. However, given the bad experience of the "socialist" heritage, it remains to be seen how many such steps forward it will go. ★

6. At the same time, the lack of an experienced and self-conscious working class may be part of the explanation for why there has been no place for an authoritarian and right wing personality using working class rhetoric like Poland's Lech Walesa.

7. As a public demonstration of their concern, the conservative and social democrat prime ministers of the new states came together on February 12/13 in an "emergency meeting" to discuss how to overcome "the grave financial crisis of the communities."

8. Of the total of 24bn DM, 5bn are supposed to be invested in municipal projects like buildings, schools, hospitals, and so on; 5.5bn for "job-creating measures"; 5.6bn for transport; 2.2bn for housing and so on. Enterprises investing in the ex-GDR will get up to 49% of their investment repaid by the state.

9. In an open letter to Chancellor Kohl, the mayors of

nine big East German cities wrote that the *Treuhand* only wanted to give the communities loss-making enterprises such as housing agencies and public transport facilities, but not profitable assets: "whatever makes money goes to the private sector."

10. Of course, there are a handful of exceptions. The most prominent one, Kurt Biedenkopf, was some years ago the general secretary of the West German CDU and enjoyed a reputation as a skilled and intelligent conservative politician. A critic of Chancellor Kohl within the limits of his bourgeois conservatism, he was fired as general secretary and given secondary party jobs. Now, as prime minister of Saxony, he is trying to win back former party posts by giving himself a profile as a defender of East Germans, using this for his inner-party struggle. There are similar examples among the Social Democrats.



Cholera reappears in Latin America

THE last cholera epidemic in Peru was more than a hundred years ago. The first cases of the new outbreak were diagnosed at the end of January 1991. By the start of February there were 500 people affected, but a week later the responsible bodies indicated that the figure had already gone over 8,000. By the beginning of March there were 34,000 cases with 134 deaths (*El Pais*, March 1, 1991). The Peruvian health minister, Carlos Vidal, has declared that there are probably 300,000 carriers of the disease and that he expected there to be around 10,000 fatalities (*Le Monde*, February 12, 1991). The following article first appeared in the March 8, 1991 issue of the Swiss revolutionary Marxist biweekly, *la Brèche*.

ROBERT LOCHHEAD

THE Peruvian government decreed a state of emergency on February 10. There is disagreement about the origin of the epidemic. There were two cholera cases on a Chinese ship, the "Happyness Panama" anchored in the port of Chimbote, 400 kms north of Lima. The cholera bacterium only reproduces in the human intestine. Thus drinking water infected with faecal matter is the most frequent source of infection. Where there is no running water in which to wash hands after a bowel motion, there is also a danger of infection through eating.

The poor of Peru's cities take their drinking water from the waters which pass down in innumerable rivulets and canals in the open air. All waste goes into the sea without purification. Thus many cases originate in infected fish and seafood. Western epidemiologists are doubtful that cholera has appeared in Peru all of a sudden; they incline to the belief that it has been developing slowly over the past few years, in undiagnosed stomach infections. On the other hand the World Health Organization rejects this explanation, on the grounds that there have been no reports of cholera in South America for years and they have confidence in the capacity of the Peruvian health authorities to diagnose it.

Chain breaks at weakest link

In any case, the chain, as usual, has broken at its weakest link. Peru is one of the most impoverished countries in Latin America and has been in economic crisis, along with the rest of the continent. Peru's descent has, however, been especially vertiginous. Cholera has always gone along with poverty and its reappearance in Peru indicates that this country has reached a new stage on the way down.

Of the 22 million Peruvians, 15.4 million live crammed into slum neighbourhoods without drains; 40% of urban districts are not connected to running water. In the capital Lima, four to seven million inhabitants live in shanty towns, in huts of mud, branches, boxes and in the *pueblos juvenes* (self-built neighbourhoods, some of which have a certain amount of infrastructure). There is no way of getting rid of refuse and in the coastal district, where most of the population live, it rarely rains. How can people be expected to wash their hands when there is only one tap for 1,000 people? The cholera bacteria are killed by boiling the water, but most inhabitants of the shanty towns are too poor to pay for the fuel.

On September 30, 1990, at the time of the United Nations conference on childhood, the Spanish daily *El Pais* published a dossier on Peruvian children. In Latin America there are some 20 million homeless children, perhaps many more. In Lima the police estimated that there were 2,500 such children in 1987, UNICEF on the other hand gave a figure of 120,000. Each year 85,000 Peruvian children die before they reach 5 years old. UNICEF estimates that 35% of Peruvian children are suffering from malnutrition.

From crisis to disintegration

Peru is a very poor country which has gone beyond economic crisis to economic disintegration. There is a foreign debt of \$20bn. Only one Peruvian in five has a steady job. Inflation reached 1770% in 1989 and 7000% in 1990. On August 8, 1990, Alan Garcia, who resisted IMF demands and halted debt repayment (in

fact it was already not being paid), was succeeded by Alberto Fujimori. Elected because he rejected the deflationist shock therapy proposed by the right wing conservative candidate Mario Vargas Llosa, President Fujimori lost no time in embarking on just such a policy. At a stroke he abolished all price support. Fuel prices rose by 3000%, water, telephone and electricity by 1000%, bread by 800% and milk by 319%.

The promised programme of social compensation for the poor was only put into effect after a delay and in a whittled down version. Certainly the currency depreciation has stopped, but the price has been a murderous recession.

The purchasing power of the middle classes has fallen by a half, and thousands of enterprises have closed their doors. Hundreds of thousands of small independent traders have been ruined and have joined the ranks of the paupers. Hundreds of thousands of workers have lost their jobs.

Peasants flee counter terror

Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of peasants from the Altiplano, swept off the land by the failure of the agrarian reform, the recession and by the counter-terror which the army justifies as a response to the terrorism of the Sendero Luminoso guerillas, are coming down to swell the numbers in the shanty towns around the big coastal cities. Before the "Fujishock" the UN considered there were seven and a half million Peruvians in dire need. Now there are five million more — bringing the total up to a half of the population.

The poor are twice struck by cholera. It

makes them ill and it deprives them of their already meagre means of existence — many of them are pedestrian food sellers. The Lima city authorities have prohibited this type of business to prevent infection through food.

The government has also exhorted the population to boil drinking water, to avoid Lima's beaches, to wash fruit and vegetables and not eat raw fish. All this is for the rich. The poor have no choice in these matters, and one of the staple meals of the people of a country which is one of the world's biggest exporters of fish is precisely raw fish marinated in lemon juice.

The government has distributed chlorine tablets to disinfect water and organized the treatment of emergency cases. The simple and tested treatment — antibiotics, medication and rehydration solutions — of one patient costs \$200. In a country where medical care has to be paid for in cash, this sum is beyond the reach of the majority. At the start of the epidemic many victims did not seek help and simply died in silence.

To get through to the shanty town population, which does not read the newspapers or listen to the radio, the government has sent loudspeaker cars through the shanty towns, to warn people and offer practical advice.

According to *Le Monde* of February 27, 1991: "the appearance of cholera is just another scorpion on the backs of the poor of the many that already exist....The weekly *Caretas* has entitled one of its articles 'the seven wounds' emphasizing: 'cholera is only one of the epidemics that we are experiencing.'

New series of epidemics in Peru

"The list is long: bubonic plague, malaria, rabies, dengue-fever, yellow fever, tuberculosis, and others continue to cut their swathe...."

"Doctor Felix Bruceno, an official for a Caritas aid programme states that: 'in the marginal and poor neighbourhoods, almost 60% of the population is underfed.' The cholera epidemic that is ravaging Peru shows the state of decomposition of a country whose population had not, only a short time before, reached such depths of poverty and vulnerability."

Cholera doubly strikes Peru. First it makes people ill and kills them, and overwhelms a health system that is already very inadequate for the poor. But it also sharply reduces fish exports; the main source of income for a country in a deep economic crisis. Ecuador, Chile and Brazil have blocked food imports from Peru. The fishing economy has thus collapsed. 1,000 tons of fish have been destroyed in Lima market since they could not be sold. 60,000 fishers and fishmongers are not

Cholera: a scourge of the poor

THE cholera bacterium only infects human beings. It is transmitted exclusively by the bowel motions of infected persons, whether they are healthy, sick or convalescent. The principal vector is drinking water contaminated by human excrement. Contagion is also passed on through raw fruits and vegetables washed with such water, by humid towels or by house flies. The bacterium can live outside the human body for 2 to 4 weeks. Elementary measures of hygiene are sufficient to eliminate the sickness; adequate sewage, a clean or sterilized water supply, bodily cleanliness. Cholera is thus strictly an indicator of poverty and the absence of means of hygiene.

But it is also an epidemic disease with a complex history; its origins lie in the Ganges Delta in Bengal. That is, in the kind of ecosystem that suits it best. A humid tropical country, with innumerable canals, rural and heavily populated, where the waters are chronically contaminated by human excrement. From Bengal it has periodically struck South East Asia and southern China.

There have been seven great epidemics of cholera outside of this area. After the sixth, which traversed Russia and Central Europe from 1899 to 1922, the disease seemed exhausted, until a seventh epidemic broke out in 1961, originating from the Celebes in Indonesia, where it had begun in 1936. This epidemic involved a new, more violent strain of the bacterium, called *Ei Tor*.

In 1963, the disease spread outside Indonesia. In 1965, winter stopped its advance in Iran, whilst the Soviet health authorities blocked it at the Caspian through draconian health measures. However, a Soviet air flight to Conakry introduced the disease again into Africa, which has been affected since then. This seventh epidemic today affects 100 countries. Now it has hit Peru via a boat from South East Asia. Experts fear it may now cross the Andes to hit the shantytowns of Colombia and the favelas of Brazil. Since the early years of this century, Europe has never been hit by cholera, save for a small outbreak of *Ei Tor* in Naples in 1973 leading to a dozen deaths.

Cholera is affected by the weather, striking above all when the rains have failed. Such is the case in Peru over the past year. ★

working (the World Health Organization has explained that tinned Peruvian fish are safe, since they will have been heated during canning.)

Tourism has also been hit, although the Tourism Office has not hesitated to spell out that there is no danger of contagion to tourists, since it is only the poor neighbourhoods that lack adequate sanitation.

Peru is now receiving more foreign aid for the struggle against cholera. Chile, Ecuador, Cuba, Brazil, the United States and Canada have offered money and drugs. Germany and the European Community (EC) have offered financial aid. UNICEF has sent 800,000 doses of rehydration solution. The Peruvian embassies in Europe are collecting antibiotics. The WHO and Red Cross underline that Peru has sufficient competent medical personnel and a relatively well organized hospital system, but lacks drugs. The Peruvian authorities state that they have the epidemic under control. The death rate of those who get the disease has fallen from 1.3% to 0.7%.

Government plays down gravity of situation

However, after appealing for aid, the Peruvian government is inclined to play down the situation given the impact on exports. Thus, the health minister has

given a figure of 110 cases in the city of Huacho, while Caritas cites 626. Caritas' health director estimates that there are ten big centres of infection. The health minister has announced that the figures will only be given out twice a week (*Le Monde*, February 23, 1991).

The disease has reached the highlands of the Altiplano and beyond that the Amazon. Eleven people have been hospitalized in Juliaca, a town situated at an altitude of 3,800 metres. The WHO believes that cholera has already reached Ecuador and Chile. UNICEF experts reckon that there will be 200 to 300,000 cases in April. Dr. Branedli of the Swiss Institute of Tropical Medicine in Basel believes that cholera is now established in Peru and will now appear in periodic waves.

The only effective long term measure is an adequate supply of clean water, which means large infrastructural projects. More than a few million dollars in emergency aid is needed.

The health ministers of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Venezuela and Peru met in Lima on February 27 to create a Latin American alliance against cholera (*El Pais*, March 1, 1991). They decided to lift the more disproportionate restrictions on Peruvian imports. The Brazilian health minister brought with him to Lima his own supplies of drinking water and food. ★

Dissent and repression in Vietnam

INTRODUCTION by Pierre Rousset

THE preparation of the 7th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) is turning out to be difficult. Unable to reach agreement at January's central committee meeting either on a draft political report or the name of a successor to the present general secretary Nguyễn Văn Linh, the party leadership decided to postpone the congress it initially scheduled for May, probably for several months. The leadership is trying to suppress debate by taking measures against the most outspoken critics and controlling the organization of the preparatory meetings. According to Phong Quang, the Central Committee Secretary has, in a series of circulars, effectively forbidden any talk of pluralism and recommended that no supporter of pluralism should be made a delegate to the Congress.¹

The leadership has decided to make public the expulsion from the party of Bùi Tín, joint editor in chief of the party daily *Nhân Dân* ("the People"), despite the fact that his own cell had rejected the expulsion last January. On March 7, 1991 the official Vietnamese press agency denounced Bùi Tín for having "betrayed the party through his activities and speeches in the foreign press and radio."²

The political bureau has not forgiven him the "petition of a citizen", which he made public in November 1990, and the three hour interview that he gave to the BBC, in which he called for an emergency programme to get the country out of its crisis and for the calling of an "extraordinary political conference."³

However, despite this new turn of the repressive screw, appeals in support of democratization continue to multiply. Last January, the writer Nguyễn Khắc Viện addressed a letter to the Patriotic Front. Hoàng Minh Chính also took up the pen to make public his criticisms. This ex-resistance fighter and former rector of the Philosophy Institute had attended the Higher Party School in Moscow from 1957 to 1960 and had returned to Vietnam convinced of Stalin's crimes. A great signer of petitions, he spent 15 years in prison and under surveillance for having sent one to the party leadership in 1963 (at the time of the "second Maoization" of the VCP) and again in 1981 (a year in which Nguyễn Khắc Viện also sent a "letter" to the National Assembly⁴).

We publish below two important documents. The first is an interview with Bùi Tín which appeared in the December 1990 issue of the review *Diễn Đàn Người Việt* ("Vietnamese Tribune"), published in Canada. It explains the reasons that led him to make his views known via the foreign radio; his thoughts on pluralism; on the mistakes of the VCP leadership; and on his own objectives.

The second is the "letter" sent by Nguyễn Khắc Viện to Nguyễn Hữu Thọ, the president of the Patriotic Front, an organization controlled by the VCP. It was published in French in the March 1991 number of the review *Doàn Kê* ("Solidarity") published in Paris. In this letter Doctor Viện sounds the alarm, stating that the coming VCP Congress is the "the last chance congress." He denounces the total monopoly of power exercised by the CP and calls for the radical separation of party and state. He analyzes the process of degeneration of the party following the victory of the revolution in terms which recall those used by a leader of the Soviet Left Opposition to Stalin, Christian Rakovsky, in his 1928 letter from exile on the "professional dangers of power." He expresses his wish that the central leaders of the party, far too old and prisoners of their old modes of thought should "themselves retire" and give way to new people.⁵

He defends the necessity to step up the struggle for liberties — on both the national and international levels — and to found to this end a "people's democratic front", to act as a counterweight to the development of the market economy, the apparatchiks and their dehumanized logic. These documents show the sharpness of the debates underway and the importance of the coming 7th VCP congress. ★

1. Phong Quang, "L'année de tous les dangers", *Doàn Kê*, no. 431, February 1991.

2. *Le Monde*, March 13, 1991.

3. See *International Viewpoint*, no. 201, March 4, 1991.

4. Hoàng Minh Chính's document is not yet available. He became acquainted with Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing Stalin's crimes when in Moscow. On his return to Vietnam in 1960, he was at first able to get his ideas accepted, but he came into conflict with the party leadership in 1963 when the VCP finally took Beijing's side against Moscow. It is impossible to say how far at the time Hoàng Minh Chính was an anti-Stalinist and how far he was simply pro-Soviet.

5. This judgement by Nguyễn Khắc Viện gives me the opportunity to correct something in my previous article. It seems that neither Võ Nguyên Giáp nor Nguyễn Cơ Thạch can really be considered as "consistent reformers." Giáp is respected for his past — as a key military leader of the anti-colonial wars — and because he has fallen victim to bureaucratic manoeuvres. But he is now very old and may be out of touch. Thạch, meanwhile, may be a convinced liberal in economic matters, but his "liberalism" is less evident as far as politics are concerned.

When the house is on fire

WE publish below an interview granted by Bùi Tín to the magazine *Diễn đàn Người Việt* ("Vietnamese Tribune") and translated from the French version which appeared in *Doàn Kê* ("Solidarity") published in Paris.*

DOCUMENT

BY rejecting the draft resolutions to be presented to the 7th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and in making public your own ideas via the BBC¹, you have broken party discipline. Why?

I have not rejected these two drafts, which I have studied with attention. I think, however that the conditions do not exist to tackle long term questions which concern the next few decades. Today socialism is undergoing a global crisis, both theoretical and practical, not only in eastern Europe but also in Asia and Cuba. The long term problems need to be looked at in a more serious way that excludes haste (we Vietnamese have suffered too much from precipitate decisions). This is why I have simply asked for the debate on these two texts to be postponed so that we can concentrate our efforts — all our efforts — on getting the country out of its crisis, which is getting worse by the day. When the house is on fire you must first put out the fire before discussing future development plans.

As for my petition, I must point out that I had already sent one to the [party] leadership in 1986, but they did not bother to reply. This time, therefore I felt I had to use a more circuitous route, that of the BBC — which has always been considered in Vietnam as an imperialist and reactionary radio station. But this was the only way in which I could rapidly and widely make my petition known to my

*For reasons of space, we have condensed the questions addressed to Bùi Tín and made a few cuts in his replies. The full version was published in French in *Doàn Kê*, December 1990. This review is in Vietnamese, but there are always some pages in French. For further information, and to obtain the complete version of the BBC interview, write to: *Doàn Kê*, 193, rue Bercy, 75582 Paris, Cedex 12 (France); tel:(33-1) 42 72 78 08.

Who is Bùi Tín?

(Pen name, Thành Tín)

— Born in 1927 in Hanoi

— Joined the People's Army in September 1945 (leaving it in 1982 with the rank of colonel).

— Member of the Communist Party since 1946.

— During the first resistance war against the French intervention, he saw action in the centre and then the north of Vietnam, and in 1954 took part in the famous battle of Điện Biên Phủ.

— He took part in the general offensive of 1975. On April 30, he accepted the surrender of the Saigon forces as the highest ranking officer of the tanks which had entered the presidential palace in Saigon.

— Joint chief editor of *Quân đội Nhân dân* ("Army Daily") between 1972 and 1981.

— Member and spokesperson of the North Vietnamese delegation to the four-party military commission in Saigon in 1973.

— From 1982 onwards member of the editorial board and from 1986 joint editor-in-chief of *Nhân Dân* ("The People", the Communist Party daily). ★

compatriots. I thus reached an agreement with the officials of the BBC's Vietnamese section according to which they would broadcast without modification the whole of the interview, which I had listened to again with care. I also insisted on the right of reply to any tendentious commentary. In short, I consider that I made good use of this means of communication without being used by it.

■ In your interview you did not deal with the most burning subject: pluralism and multipartyism. What are your views on this subject?

I was seeking above all to convince. This is why my petition was framed in a measured, calm and courteous manner....

My point of view on pluralism is the following: plurality was certainly one of the strong points of the renewal process launched in 1986. It became a reality in the economic field, when the existence of five economic components was recognized, and our constitution and the law guarantee religious freedom. Political plurality exists from the moment when a debate of ideas and public dialogue are encouraged. Artistic and cultural plurality exist when there is a recognition of the existence of different styles, schools and methods. Thus there are already elements of pluralism.

As for multipartyism, you have to take

into account the concrete situation in each country. As a general rule the existence of several legal political parties is a necessary condition for democracy. Multipartyism stimulates political life, engenders emulation between parties and reciprocal control. There are however exceptions due to specific historic conditions. It has happened that a single party has had to assume a historic task; and this was the case in Vietnam before 1975. There are, on the other hand, countries, such as South Korea, where multipartyism is no proof of democracy.

But to affirm that in Vietnam, since the VCP has been the sole leading party, it must remain so until the end of time, is a sign of a simplistic and subjectivist conception of history.

It is all the more regrettable that this has been said by the highest leader of the party². This type of affirmation may lead people to think that the Communists hang on to power simply out of their own interest. In a democracy the country's leaders must be chosen by the people, elected by the citizens.

■ What does the party want?

The renewal process launched in 1986 was well underway when the eastern European events exploded. This led to a strong and regrettable reaction of panic in the party. The leaders have analyzed what happened badly. For them the eastern European events were above all provoked by the hand of imperialism and reactionaries, and are also due to the rightist/opportunist line of Mikhail Gorbachev.

From all this they have drawn a lesson: redouble vigilance with regard to the imperialist and reactionary forces and defend Marxism-Leninism; these are to be the party's two priority tasks. This error of judgement and this psychosis, have, in my opinion, blocked the renewal process, and even provoked a return to the past with its procession of errors as well as giving a bad impression to the rest of the world.

Three years ago, the leaders called on the writers and artists to tell the truth, to refuse to write to order, to win creative freedom for themselves. But those that took the leaders at their word have found themselves criticized, neutralized and victimized. This is not logical and is in any case a regrettable error.

■ The VCP's mistakes are not of recent date.

Vietnam's contemporary history has been marked by the great victories won in the course of the national liberation struggle. On the other hand a series of problems have been left on ice, and these must be looked at again, not in order to

victimize particular protagonists, but in order to enrich our historical experience, our national wisdom and also to bring peace to souls.

Among the main mistakes that have been committed, I would put in first place the leftism that has marked our party for a long time. It began with the slogans of 1930-31 "tear out by the roots the intellectuals, the rich, the landowners and the notables," and the discriminatory policy towards other patriotic organizations, as for example the Viet Nam Quốc Dân Đảng party (the Vietnamese equivalent of the Chinese bourgeois nationalist *Guomindang*).

Then there are the serious mistakes committed during the land reform of 1953-56 which led to the deaths of some ten thousand innocent people. In the following decades the priority given to heavy industry and the rapid collectivization of agriculture held back the productive forces and caused immense losses to our society.

There have been numerous "political affairs" such as the Nhân Văn-Giai Phạm affair, the affairs of the "revisionists, anti-party elements and reactionaries" in which [leading army officers, political cadres, journalists, academics, artists and intellectuals] were caught up, without forgetting the 12 colonels arrested just after the congress of the party organization inside the army in 1986.³

All these matters must be publicly cleared up in conformity with the law. The victims must be publicly rehabilitated in a clearcut fashion.

■ At present, the VCP intends to pursue the economic opening while rejecting any political relaxation. While there is an entente with China, America is also being courted.

In my opinion, the renewal process must be coherent, and politics and economics must be developed reciprocally. Furthermore, internal and external policies must innovate side by side, each as an extension of the other. In this restructuring, the respective roles of the party, the national assembly, the elected organs and the front must be clearly and precisely defined.

On the diplomatic level, relations must be normalized in every direction and any exclusive alignment must be rejected, so that our country becomes a factor of stability and cooperation in the region, and we are firmly integrated into the international community.

Any relation of vassalage towards Beijing with the aim of normalizing relations with the Chinese Communist Party, or

1. The BBC interview will be published in the forthcoming issue of *Chroniques vietnamiennes*, which can be obtained from: Boîte postale 246, 75524 Paris, cedex 11, France.

2. By Nguyễn Văn Linh, the VCP's general secretary in a speech on September 1, 1989.

going cap in hand to the United States, smacks of political fantasy. It would be pitiable and vain.

As for internal policies, the primordial task is to democratize in a consistent manner, without hesitation. Deeds must conform to words. To promote national unity through the mobilization of all the material, intellectual and moral capacities of all our compatriots, including those in the diaspora, appealing to their love for their country.

Reconciliation and national harmony must be sincerely and deeply put into practice, and all discrimination against the overseas Vietnamese and against religions must be abolished.

■ At the end of November 1990, the 10th plenum of the Central Committee of the VCP stressed the need to reinforce public security.

I have sensed rising panic among our leaders since the 10th plenum. Tighten the belt, rely on our own forces, deliberately exaggerate the external threats... It is not with slogans such as these that the crisis will be overcome. On the contrary they risk making things worse....

■ Who are you addressing by making your petition public? And what consequences are you preparing for?

....If this petition has any strength, it lies in its rationality, in its realism. I hope that it will reach not only the ears of the leaders (who will probably throw it into the wastebin) but also and above all those of many of my compatriots. I believe in the power of public opinion. Since I believe this, I have avoided demagogic proposals, limiting myself to spelling out what seems true to me, to say: *there are things wrong in Vietnam*.

I thus hope to contribute to stimulating, enriching and democratizing the debates in the society and in the party's congresses.

It is through a vast democratic debate that a way out will be found to the crisis from which our country is suffering. I am not driven by personal political ambition. I am simply trying to take up my responsibilities as a citizen.

By prolonging my stay in France, I am not seeking political asylum. I am intending to return to Vietnam and join my efforts with those of our compatriots in order to find a solution to our country's problems. ★

3. The group of intellectuals known as Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm ("Humanism and Letters") was harshly repressed in 1956. From 1963, when the VCP took the Chinese side in the Sino-Soviet split, until 1967, when the Chinese "Cultural Revolution" caused a crisis in Sino-Vietnamese relations, there were a series of "affairs" in which cadres were accused of "revisionism" or being "anti-party" or "reactionary". Finally, in 1986, the VCP organization in the army refused to elect the top military leaders as their delegates to the 6th congress. Pressures and repression against 12 colonels followed.

A "people's democratic front"

DOCTOR Nguyễn Khắc Viện did not attend his Patriotic Front meeting to discuss the draft texts for the 7th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP). He explained his reasons in a letter of January 7, 1991 addressed to the Front's president Nguyễn Hữu Thọ.

DOCUMENT

FIRST of all, excuse me for not attending this meeting of the Patriotic Front. Without doubt you want to know my reasons, and I will therefore give them to you here. I do not want to debate the "Programme" or the "Strategy"; this is not the time. There are other, more urgent, things to do.

The essential problem facing the 7th Congress is not political programme, it is to resolve the question of organization. The 6th Congress [in 1986] came out with a correct line but did not establish a new organization; this is the main contradiction of the past few years. If this question is not resolved, there will be no progress. Worse, we can only sink deeper into crisis.

The party apparatus is today totally powerless, plunging society into disorder and preventing any development. This impotence originates in the fact that:

1. The party's committees, both at central and local level, hold all power. The Political Bureau, the Secretariat, the Central Organization Commission, the Central Commission for Culture and Ideology decide all concrete questions, while the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly, the ministries and the departments simply carry out instructions.

At the provincial level, each federal party secretary is an overlord who decides everything, from economics to culture, passing through the naming of personnel. The same is true at the level of each district, and each community.

The result of this confusion between the party and state apparatuses is a situation where decisions can only be taken slowly and where each tries to shift



responsibility onto someone else. Finally, in the real sense of the terms there is neither leadership nor management, and the impotence of the state apparatus goes hand in hand with the degeneration of the party.

Power corrupts...

The party is degenerating because it directly holds power. If, in the past, to join the party was to voluntarily join in its struggles and risk imprisonment, today it is no more than a way of getting promotion. The opportunists pounce on the party and each leader is surrounded with courtiers, while anyone who shows signs of rectitude, resolution or uprightness is isolated and discouraged. For as long as the party retains power the degeneration will continue, and neither educational activity nor criticism and self-criticism will be any help. There is nothing that is more easy for the corrupt people than to repress their accusers and to do this in the name of the party itself.

2. The population, the cadres and the party's rank-and-file militants have lost all confidence in the leading personnel. The Political Bureau, the Secretariat, the Central Organization Commission and the Central Commission for Culture and Ideology only include comrades who are too old, physically incapable (after 70 people should retire)² or too rooted in the old habits of thought and work and unable to follow present day trends, to be in step with the new generations, or to grasp new problems.

My wish is that the 7th Congress should concentrate its efforts in order to definitively sort out two problems:

a) The party must firmly state its intention to give back to the different elected and state organs all their powers. Concretely, it should proceed to the dissolution of a series of organs of the Central Committee and party committees at a local level; it must give back property and two thirds of its cadres to the state; the reduction of personnel must begin with

1. The "Political Programme for the Construction of Socialism" and the "Strategy for Socio-economic Stabilization and Development until the Year 2,000" are the two official draft documents for the 7th VCP Congress.

2. The average age of members of the Political Bureau is 74 years, of Central Committee members 64 years.

the party's organizations.

b) The comrades currently at the head of the CC's organs should retire and give way to new people. This would be an act of the highest patriotism, highly appreciated by the population and the cadres, susceptible to recreate the confidence that has been so much undermined. If these comrades insist on staying in place this will only detract from their glorious past and they will be responsible for the coming collapse.

If the Congress is unable to clearly and definitively tackle these two questions (and my most sincere wish is to see my predictions disproved) our country faces dark years.

I would like to put forward some ideas on the situation in the country:

The private economy is going to develop and foreign firms will invest in Vietnam. This is a tendency that cannot be resisted and which will allow scientific and technical progress and will permit some people to use their abilities. The national bourgeoisie and foreign capital are going to make an alliance to exploit the resources and labour force. To service this economic structure there will be a threefold apparatus: the apparatus of economic management; the state apparatus of government (administration, police); and the cultural apparatus (which controls the media).

Now, from the moment when there is a market economy, profit is king, and talk of humanity is out of the window. Furthermore, humanity is not the hallmark of bureaucratic apparatuses. Faced with such an economic/political/ideological apparatus, which is both national and international (in that a higher cadre of this apparatus will consider him or herself at once as Vietnamese and as belonging to Mitsubishi, Toyota or Philips) the people must form a democratic front as a counterweight and defend:

- Democratic liberties.
- Social justice (to assure reasonable pay for the workers; avoid excessive social differentiation; assure education and health; defend culture).
- The environment.
- Peace.

Such a front, while rejecting armed struggle, must put to work all forms of democratic struggle to obtain above all:

* The freedom of the press and of thought.

* Freedom of association to organize its own activity free from apparatus dictates.

It was through a constant 200 year struggle that the populations of the developed capitalist countries were able to establish a regime that we have wrongly qualified as "bourgeois" democratic. Democratic liberties and social rights were torn from the bourgeoisie in struggle and should thus be called popular liberties, if the real meaning of the development is to be understood. If a world front of capital is being founded, its counterweight, the

Doctor Viên

DOCTOR Nguyễn Khắc Viên is 78 years old. He heads the Centre for the Study of Child Psychology, a non-governmental organization. The first NGO of this type in Vietnam, it was founded in October 1988 by a group of pediatricians and pedagogues.

Despite his fragile health (he had a lung removed in his youth), Viên has engaged in militant activity since 1943 until the present day, first as an anti-colonialist Vietnamese nationalist and then as a Communist. He spent 25 years in France before returning to Vietnam in 1963; doctor Viên is at home in two cultures.

Just after the Second World War, Viên collaborated with Trotskyist militants in the Vietnamese workers' organization in France. In 1949, however, he rejoined the French Communist Party and adopted all its positions, including blind support of Stalin and the denunciation of Yugoslavia's Tito or the Trotskyists in France. However, according to Hoang Giang, unlike many others, he preferred to use political means in such struggles rather than outrageous slanders (See *Chroniques Vietnamiennes*, no. 4, summer 1986, p.21).

On his return to Vietnam in 1963, he naturally joined the VCP. Out of respect for his personality he was able to keep his "seniority" in the movement despite the change of party — an exceptional measure.

He became director of *Études vietnamiennes*, a magazine of high quality, until his retirement age. Throughout the years he has been one of the best known Vietnamese intellectuals and one of the most convincing official spokespersons of the VCP. Many of my generation, aroused to act by the imperialist war in Indochina, learned much from him, both about the country itself and about its war of liberation.

Later on, Viên turned his attention to the problem of the bureaucracy. He became increasingly involved in the struggle for the reform of the party. In 1981, he sent a first open "letter" to the National Assembly (in order to underline the preeminence that he would henceforth accord to the state over the party) which castigates the bureaucratic inertia and Maoist heritage of the VCP.

In the run-up to the 6th Congress in 1986, he came out resolutely on the side of the renovators. He also appears to have expected a lot from Gorbachev's USSR.

The new "letter" that we republish here shows that his thinking is continuing to develop. It seems to show the end of illusions in the Soviet leadership and throws a harsh and clear light on the current state of the VCP. It also raises a whole range of questions on the lessons of the current upheavals in the world.

— PR. ★

democratic popular front on a world scale, is also in formation. Our people cannot stay on the sidelines. It is not only in the so-called socialist countries that we have friends. The moment will come when limits will be imposed on the apparatus, which will be bound hand and foot, when the words capitalism and socialism will no longer have any importance. The democratic front will have changed its nature.

Freedom of the press, of association, of petition, of demonstration, to strike and of election are the forms of struggle of our epoch; they are proven means that can lead to profound reforms. According to the context of each country, the formation of the front will be more or less slow or difficult.

Let us hope that our party will be able to reform itself and become part of the framework of such a front. Today, the party leadership is heading in the opposite direction. The lack of democracy in the party and society have led it to reject persons of conviction (such as Bùi Tín, Duong Thu Huong, those Vietnamese living outside the country who have

signed the "letter" and before that such comrades as Lê Liêm, Ung Van Khiêm, or Dang Kim Giang) and made them into opponents. A great number have been demoralized, among them, one can say, almost all the idealistic youth and intelligentsia³.

These are some of my thoughts and hopes, since, at my age, and in my weakened physical condition, I no longer have other ambitions. I will devote the years that remain to me to the development of studies in child psychology in the framework of the N-T Centre which, along with friends, I have helped to set up over the past two years.⁴ ★

3. For more on Duong Thu Huong and the "Letter" of diaspora Vietnamese see *International Viewpoint*, no. 201, March 4, 1991. For Bùi Tín see article on page 13 of this number of *IV*. The three other "comrades" to which Viên refers were condemned for "revisionism" or "anti-partyism", during the "affairs" that shook the VCP in 1963 and 1967. Lê Liêm was CC member and vice-minister of culture, Ung Van Khiêm was minister of foreign affairs and Dang Kim Giang was a general in the people's army.

4. N-T is the Vietnamese abbreviation of studies in infantile psychology, the non-governmental organization led by Viên.

Putting politics in command

THE US war in the Gulf is, in its broadest contours, an effort by the US to define a new military-centred global order in which markets, income and resource shares are defined not by technological market power, but by political-military dominance. The following article, which first appeared in the March 2-9 edition of the Bombay journal *Economic and Political Weekly*, attempts an overview of the strategy of the US military/industrial complex and its limitations. The article was written before the end of the war.

JAMES PETRAS

THE UNITED States war in the Gulf is an attempt to recreate Washington's role as world policeman, to re-subordinate Europe to US power, to intimidate the Third World into submission. In a way it is an attempt to regain the position of global supremacy held by the United States at the end of the Second World War. In this sense George Bush is executing the political vision of the Reagan period in its most extreme fashion. The massive build up of military power, the worldwide pressure on clients, allies, and neutrals to collaborate, the vast economic expenditures, the unprecedented unleashing of aerial bombardment, all speak of the momentous historical changes that underlie this war.

The preparation for this war demonstrates the enormous capacity and resources that Washington has at its disposal. It also reflects a deep-rooted sense of decline and the fear of the growing challenges to that global supremacy. The war is not about "oil" — and even less about "self-determination" (no country can match the US record of violations over the past two decades), but about creating the foundations for launching a new set of political, economic and social relations to sustain the United States as the dominant power in the world. That is the meaning of the Bush and Baker vision of the New World Order and the war that is being waged on its behalf.

Prior to the Gulf War there were numerous indications that the global decline of the United States was accelerating; in Eastern Europe and Russia the "ideological victory" over Stalinism also revealed the tremendous incapacity of the US to provide economic resources to "reshape" these economies to its needs or even to subsidize new client regimes. Instead,

nant power in the region.

In western Europe the decline of NATO substantially weakened US leverage over European governments and economic policy; European-centred military and security proposals paralleled deeper economic integration. At the policy level, declining influence became obvious in Washington's incapacity to impose its liberal agricultural and "services" (banking, finances, and so on) agenda during the Uruguay round of the GATT meetings. The proximity of 1992 and the union of Europe is seen as a strategic threat, closing off markets in western Europe and challenging the position of the US elsewhere.

The cumulative gains of Japan and its virtual displacement of the US as the major investor and trading partner in Asia — the most dynamic growth region in the world — is a clear signal of declining influence. In a world in which global power is increasingly determined by industrial and financial activities and market exchanges based on strong industrial states, Washington strategists must have recognized that the US is a sure loser.

Pillage of existing markets

The decline of US global power is even evident in Latin America, where haphazard efforts have been made to preserve areas of traditional domination. Bush's "Enterprise for the Americas" proposal was more rhetoric than substance, more pillage of existing markets and resources than any strategic commitment to large-scale, long-term investments to expand productive capacity. The initial sums promised (\$300m) would cover Latin America's foreign debt payments for four days.

More to the point, the continuing massive outflows of interest payments and



most observers saw Germany as the dominant

profits from Latin America to the US (\$35bn per year) and the incapacity of the United States to reconstruct the economies of small, reconquered nations (Grenada, Panama, Nicaragua) demonstrate the tremendous gap between the power of the US to dominate and its incapacity to rebuild economically viable client states.

This global context of deteriorating power — power lost to capitalist competition and Third World challengers — would, if continued over time, either force internal structural changes in the United States or lead to the relegation of the US to a status of non-hegemony. The impending loss of global supremacy and the incapacity to take economic advantage of the openings in East Europe, Russia, China, and the rest of Asia is frustrating to US policy-makers.

Blocked by their economic weakness from seizing the new openings, Washington's frustration has increased because of the tremendous stockpile of advanced military weaponry at its disposal. The disjuncture between military and economic power in the new post cold war conjuncture has been acutely felt and was instrumental in launching the Gulf War. Of what use were guided missiles and stealth bombers in competing for influence in western European markets? How were Pentagon budgets to compete with Deutsche Bank loans for influence in eastern Europe or the Soviet Union? The contradiction was transparent; in the post cold war period (and even before), the rules for achieving global power were rooted in competition in the world market, while the US was still geared toward projection of military power.

The US war in the Gulf is in its deepest sense a means of challenging the rules of global power; of subordinating economic competitors into docile bankers of US military conquests; of converting economic resources from markets toward war subsidies; of disaggregating European alliances in favour of US-centred coalitions; of trading Third World debt payments for

military contingents under US command.

The Gulf War is in its broadest contours an effort to *reverse* world historical trends that are moving to relegate the United States to the status of a second class power. It is meant to define a new military-centred global order in which markets, income, and resource shares are defined not by technological-market power, but by political-military dominance. Under these rules Washington's comparative advantage in military power would ensure US global supremacy, and would undermine the capacity of its competitors to mount an effective challenge to its position.

The Bush administration's attempt to change the rules defining global power relations and economic conditions — internal and external — under which imperial revivalism takes place, will have a profound effect on US society as well as on future relations with competitors. Launching a major war at a time of declining economic activity and deteriorating urban life means that, unlike previous wars, this one will absorb scarce economic resources and further erode social conditions. It will undermine public services and increase financial instability. This imperialist war cannot provide economic payments for labour, tying the working class to the war through higher wages and better jobs. This war exploits labour at home to support wealthy rentier clients in the Gulf; the international linkages are financed by appropriating internal resources.

The absence of imperial pay-offs for labour creates a serious political problem; how can the Bush administration sustain a war for global hegemony that cannot rely on economic pay-offs and spin-offs to labour and business to reinforce chauvinist ideological appeals? The answer lies in the militarization of US culture and society through a mass propaganda blitz. Almost 24 hours a day every major media outlet has been engaged in a campaign to capture the hearts and minds of the American people.

Militarization of political debate

The war, as presented by the state and the media, is defined strictly according to the military censors. Television and radio programs are organized to focus on military strategies and rationales presented by military officials and strategists of war. News commentators selectively interview rank-and-file soldiers, giving the Pentagon a "back home, folksy" face. Bombings are described in terms of objects destroyed, according to technical formulas approved by military and the chief policy-makers. Congressional officials compete with the executive branch in embracing the new military metaphysics. Liberal columnists reinforce the same message; the merits of various techniques

of warfare are debated over and over against any critical analysis of the rentier classes and global power interests that they serve.

Nowhere is the massive destruction of Iraq, the terror bombing of the population, the enormous economic and human cost to the American people publicly debated or even discussed. More important, the larger political-military issues of the global US power that underlie the war are totally obscured by rhetoric about liberating Kuwait, defending democracy, opposing Hussein. Vague references to a "New World Order" effectively obscure the role that Washington foresees for itself as the prime beneficiary and dominant force in this "New Order".

The "militarization" of American society serves to create a culture of citizen obedience to military authority and submissiveness to the authority of war. Mass campaigns are encouraged to support the soldiers as a way of blunting criticism of the war makers. The militarization barrage has even affected sectors of the anti-war opposition; every call to end the war is balanced by "support" of our soldiers. This misplaced accommodation to the power of state rhetoric replaces an effort to fight the economic system that fails to provide meaningful, productive work at home and forces young people into the armed forces.

The Great Power designs to which soldiers' lives are sacrificed are ignored by sectors of the anti-war movement which accept the rhetoric of US intervention that says that the war is about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and that a military blockade and economic sanctions should be "given a chance". This position, sharing as it does the ideological premises that undergird the US projection of power and military intervention, legitimates the bases for future escalation and intervention

elsewhere. The differences are "tactical" — the common ground of intervention is in place.

Military politics dominate debates; some argue for continual mass bombing ("to save American lives"), while others advocate a ground war. This pseudo-debate finds its most perverse expression in the emerging discussion of the ultimate irrationality of the military logic, the discussion of whether and under what conditions nuclear and biological weapons might or might not be used against Iraq (by none other than Leslie Gelb of the *New York Times*).

The saturation of public life with military definitions of reality and the wide swathe of political organizations and institutions submerged within that reality are indicative of the powerful ideological resources at the disposal of the state. The high level of state-media coordination is also indicative of the potential fragility of support, given the absence of any "material reinforcement".

If the Gulf War is primarily about the US reshaping a New World Order anchored in military supremacy over its market-based competitors, it also involves the cultivation and protection of client regimes whose interests are linked to this global project. The Gulf oil monarchies recycle hundreds of billions of dollars of rentier earnings to US banks. Israel provides overt military support to the US in west Asia and clandestine arms and intelligence to terrorist Third World US client regimes.

The United States' defence of the authoritarian Kuwaiti regime and the autocratic Saudi monarchy is in part political payment for their economic support of US intervention in South Africa, central America and elsewhere. More important, these rentier states do not compete with the US economy in global markets;



they share the United States' *parasitical* relation to the producer countries, north and south, east and west. While the US extracts loans and debt payments, the sheikhs receive ground rents.

Israel is in an analogous parasitical position; its economy is heavily based on arms sales; US and to, a lesser degree, European grants and aid (public and private); land appropriated from the Arabs; and professional and skilled labour trained and educated at the expense of Communist societies and western taxpayers. Like the United States, Israel lives off ideological appeals and military capacities that far outrun its economic-technical production. US military definitions of the New World Order resonate with Israeli "comparative advantages" — particularly as it seeks to carve out a role as a regional power.

The Israeli military definition of politics has been refracted through its supporters among the leadership of the all-inclusive Major Jewish Organizations (MJOs) in the US. From the beginning of the Gulf conflict, the MJOs have seconded and encouraged every major escalation of the war and have given unconditional support to Bush's policy; they are practically the only major ethno-religious organization to adopt such an unequivocal position. The influence of the pro-Israel lobby extends to influential newspapers and sectors of the mass media whose writers, publishers and newscasters frequently cite or call on Israeli officials for political commentary.

The chauvinist froth pumped out by the mass media and the military rationale elaborated by the elite press to the educated classes tacitly recognizes the growing gulf between the classes paying for and fighting the war, and the local and overseas promoters and benefactors. The militarization of cultural life can be temporarily successful only insofar as the "reality principle" can be avoided. As the costs mount at home and abroad, directly affecting the lives of millions of Americans, and as the unequal benefits and costs become increasingly transparent, a political backlash is likely to occur, pitting pro-war ideologues and the state apparatus against a formidable array of classes.

Japanese and European ingratitude

The New World Order that Bush and Baker hope to fashion out of the Gulf War is based on the notion of subordination of Europe and Japan to US global ends. Throughout the war, the US news media presented Japan and Germany as ungrateful oil importers benefitting from US military activity without contributing their share of money and military forces. War's

morality aside, neither Germany nor Japan has any great interest in or commitment to a military confrontation in the Gulf; their market positions ensure their supply of petrol. Neither country has an interest in diverting economic resources from technological development to a military buildup that has no positive impact on its economic expansion, particularly in international markets. Moreover, a war on behalf of monarchical clients of the US will hardly enhance their influence.

Even during the war, US supremacy over its allies is more appearance than substance. The economic contributions dribble in (and in part take the form of credits and loans to bankrupt US mideast clients), and delivery lags far behind promises. Washington's policy of "creating facts" — projecting power and then

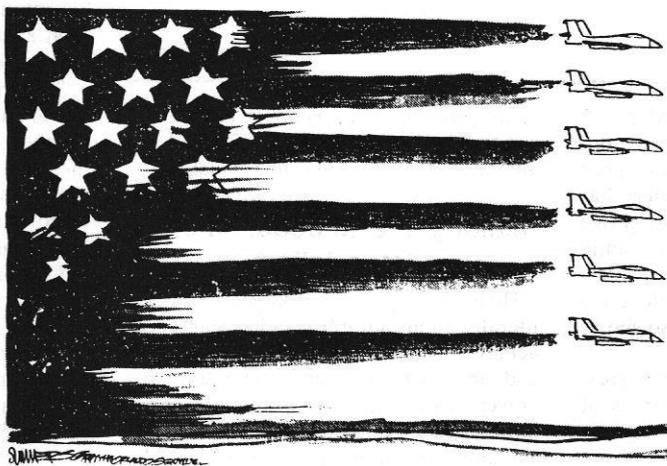
Fleet might serve as a kind of "toll collector", charging fees for oil shipments to Europe and Japan. Of course this is a far-fetched idea, but so is the idea of establishing a New World Order based on US military supremacy over its powerful economic allies. The alternative is even less plausible; the use of military threats to coerce Germany and Japan into falling in line with the command structure of the United States, an idea hardly likely to carry much weight with the US treasury in debt to Japanese banks and US multinationals dependent on European markets.

The Bush-Baker vision of a "New World Order" based on US military power is really a transplant of the role and practice of "extractive capitalists" in the United States — the oil and raw material investors in the Third World. Their view of the world is derived from their Third World experiences, where they extend their economic interests through Pentagon and CIA influence to establish favourable client regimes which then open up their countries to exploitation by the United States. In these Third World extractive contexts US military power does serve to consolidate hegemony over client states to open up economic opportunities.

The politics of extractive capitalism

George Bush is largely a product of two important strands of "extractive capital"; Texas oil and the CIA. His effort to expand the practices and relations of extractive capitalism in the Third World to a world scale is not only doomed to failure, but reflects the total ineptness of strategic thinking in US policy circles today. Germany and Japan are not about to submit to US dictates on trade policy as Mexico has done; their banks finance the US not vice versa. Nor is the United States likely to find senior military officers in these countries eager to submit to their US counterparts in efforts to undercut national industries.

The unreality of the New World Order pursued by Bush and Baker speaks to a degree of voluntarism born of a blighted vision — one that looks only at the ideological and military role of power and not the economic; one that looks only at US-Third World military ideological success in counter-insurgency and ignores US failures in market competition; one that looks backward to a past era of US dominance and ignores the present and future world of relative equal competitors; one that celebrates ideological victories over Communism and ignores the hollowing-out of urban capitalism in America. The blind spots are not minor; they are major determinants of global power and strategic failures. ★



forcing the Europeans and Japanese to support US positions — has temporarily pre-empted the formulation of a common European position, and Britain has been able to reassert its primary loyalty to the US-led military alliance over and against a common European policy. But this European "retreat" toward American primacy has no structural basis; Washington has neither the economic capacity, the strategic planning, nor the military will to hold Europe and Japan under its tutelage. Even Britain's role in the Gulf is less a product of US policy than a function of its own financial interest in the Gulf banks.

If Washington cannot even fully reassert its primacy in the midst of the war, how can it be expected to reestablish a framework for supremacy after the war, when the scramble for contracts, markets and oil will unleash all the expansionist appetites of Japan and Europe? To accomplish dominance, new rules would have to be established to enable the United States to pursue its vision of the New World Order.

In all likelihood these rules would resemble those of the neo-mercantilist world of the 18th century. The US would presumably impose economic charges for its military services. The Seventh

How Washington worked for a war

SINCE the start of the Gulf crisis in August 1990 Washington's "Authorized Version" of the roots and meaning of the conflict has been challenged by a series of insights into American diplomatic activity before its outbreak. Further "counter-evidence" appeared in the March 5 edition of the New York weekly, *Village Voice*. This comment on that information is taken from the April 1991 number of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, the journal of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, an organization of sympathizers of the Fourth International in the United States.

BIDOM

WRITING in the March 5 *Village Voice's* lead story [published in New York City] Michael Emery has compiled conclusive evidence to prove that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait could have been prevented and that even afterwards, an Iraqi withdrawal could have been effected without war. He also shows that the invasion, whether justified or not, was in no way an act of wanton aggression, but the consequence of months of Kuwaiti and Saudi provocations against Iraq. Emery writes:

"The evidence shows that President George Bush, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, and other Arab leaders secretly cooperated on a number of occasions, beginning in August 1988, to deny Saddam Hussein the economic help he demanded for the reconstruction of his nation.

"In addition, parties to the Arab negotiations say the Kuwaitis — who had actively supported Saddam in his war with the Shi'ite fundamentalists of Iran, providing billions of dollars in loans and helping him to acquire sophisticated weapons otherwise unavailable to the widely mistrusted Iraqi regime — had enthusiastically participated in a behind-the-scenes economic campaign inspired by Western intelligence agencies against Iraqi interests. The Kuwaitis even went so far as to dump oil for less than the agreed upon OPEC price, something the Kuwaitis, with their vast holdings in the West, could easily afford, but which undercut the oil revenues essential to a cash hungry Baghdad."

Emery's source is not a confidential informant. It is none other than King Hussein of Jordan, who has been directly involved in the diplomacy between Iraq and Kuwait since long before anyone outside the region knew there was even a

slight problem. King Hussein has no reason to lie: his track record as a friend and ally of US imperialism is unassailable.

Making the Mideast safe for imperialism

He has held power for 38 years — quite literally all his adult life and a remarkable achievement for a Middle Eastern ruler — and he has done everything within his power to make the Middle East safe for imperialist exploitation. His biggest accomplishment in that regard was the decisive defeat his forces inflicted on the PLO in "Black September" of 1970.

Furthermore, because Jordan is poor in natural resources and rich in Palestinian refugees, he has had to depend on foreign aid to keep his country afloat. One of the biggest sources of foreign aid has been Kuwait.

Emery confirms that the issues which led to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait were: Iraq's war debt of about \$80 billion; Kuwait's refusal to abide by OPEC production quotas, thereby keeping the price of oil too low for Iraq to meet its debt obligations; and the border dispute centering on the Rumailah oilfield, which extends for a

few kilometers into Kuwait across Iraq's southern border.

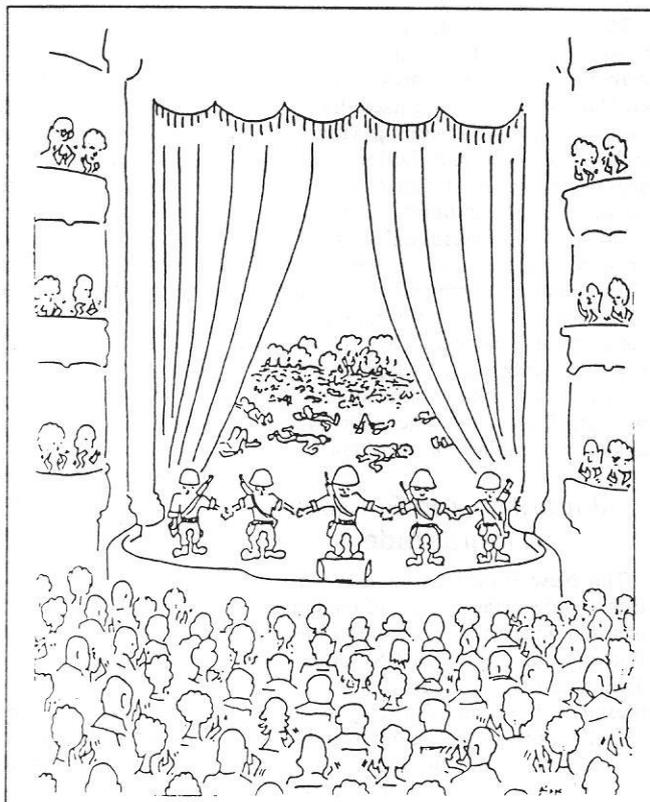
During July of 1990, Saddam ordered over 100,000 troops to the Kuwaiti border. At the same time negotiations were being conducted in advance of a summit meeting at Jidda, Saudi Arabia, to be attended by Saudi King Fahd, the emir of Kuwait Jaber al-Ahmad as-Sabah, and Saddam Hussein. Emery writes:

"The secret arrangement...was that the Saudis and the Kuwaitis would pledge an initial \$10 billion to assist the war-weary Iraqis, as a down payment on the \$30 billion Saddam demanded last May. The issue of war debt reduction, the disputed boundary and secret oil production were all supposed to be on the table...."

"King Hussein told the *Voice* that he had been so concerned about the parlous nature of the Jidda conference that he and his entourage flew to Baghdad on July 30. That's when he first discovered how truly angry Saddam was...."

"The king immediately flew from Baghdad to Kuwait to urge the as-Sabahs to soften their attitude toward Iraq (at the time, the king had no idea that a rough agreement had already been sketched out). According to both the king and another participant, despite Saddam's army on their border, the Kuwaitis were in no mood to listen. Why were the rulers of this tiny city-state sure of themselves?"

"Apparently, the Kuwaitis thought they knew something the Iraqis didn't. In their July 30 meeting, Kuwaiti foreign minister, Sheikh Sabeh Ahmed al-Jaber as-Sabah, the emir's brother, began by making sarcastic remarks about the Iraqi soldiers near the border. The Jordanians rebuked him,



urging the sheikh to take the Iraqis seriously at the mini-summit scheduled for the next day. Then Sheikh Sabeh shocked the Jordanian delegation by saying: 'we are not going to respond to [Iraq].... If they don't like it, let them occupy our territory...we are going to bring in the Americans....'

"The Jidda session lasted only two hours. To Saddam's astonishment, according to a source close to the discussion, the Kuwaitis offered an enraged Izzat Ibrahim [the Iraqi vice president] — the man who announced Iraq's rejection of the Bush ultimatum...a mere \$500,000. The meeting broke up without even a discussion of Iraq's oil production and border complaints. Two days later, Saddam invaded Kuwait."

The *Village Voice* obtained a copy of King Fahd's invitation to the emir to the Jidda conference. Across the top is a note handwritten by the emir to his foreign minister. It reads as follows:

"We will attend the meeting according to the conditions we agreed upon. What is important to us is our national interest. Do not listen to anything you hear from the Saudis and Iraqis on brotherhood and Arab solidarity. Each of them has their own interest."

"The Saudis want to weaken us and exploit our concessions to the Iraqis, so that we will concede to them [the Saudis] in the future the divided [neutral] zone [where new oil reserves are reported]. The Iraqis want to compensate their war expenditures from our accounts. Neither this nor that should happen. *This is also the opinion of our friends in Egypt, Washington and London.* Be unwavering in your discussions. We are stronger than they think. Wishing you success." [Emphasis added].

"Arab solution" attempted

After the invasion, King Hussein attempted to bring about an "Arab solution" with the misunderstanding that he had Saudi and Egyptian support for his efforts. He went to Baghdad to convince Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops from Kuwait. On August 3 — the day after the invasion — the king had agreement from Saddam that the troops would be withdrawn starting August 5 and that either Saddam himself or a representative would attend a second Arab summit meeting in Jidda on August 5. Saddam's condition was that there be no public condemnation of Iraq and that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait live up to the terms of their pre-July 31 agreement. However, by the evening of August 3, the Arab League, meeting in Cairo, had at Mubarak's urging issued a public condemnation of Iraq, and it was common knowledge that London and Washington were pressuring Mubarak to get the resolution adopted. King Hussein insists that, in spite of George Bush's dire warnings about the

danger of Saddam Hussein's "expansionism" Saudi Arabia was never in danger:

"The king recalls how on August 7, after receiving an American cable warning that Saddam might gobble up the Saudi regime, he offered a visiting Saudi official 'half of the [Jordanian] army' if a genuine threat existed. But the Saudi said that help was not needed, that he had been with King Fahd that very day and the king had seemed confident and secure. Certainly no urgent need for Jordanian military help was mentioned."

"But within 30 minutes of the Saudi official's departure, King Hussein received news that the first US troops had arrived. President Bush cited the threat to Saudi Arabia in his decision to send the Rapid Deployment Force to form the first skirmish of Desert Shield..."

"But Saddam's intentions were actually less critical at this juncture than Western intentions. In another conversation King Hussein had at around this time, with then British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady let it slip that 'troops were halfway to their destination before the request came for them to come'."

Kuwaiti stance encouraged

Emery's report shows that had the United States and Britain encouraged measures which could have addressed Iraq's economic difficulties after the war with Iran, Saddam would have chosen not to invade Kuwait. Instead, however, Washington and London encouraged the Kuwaitis in their intransigent insistence on payment with interest on their outstanding loans and their refusal to provide the least financial assistance, even though Iraq was virtually bankrupted by the war which the Kuwaitis and Americans had promoted.

"Instead of warning of the serious consequences of any Iraqi military action against Kuwait, in the famous July 25 meeting between Ambassador April Glaspie and Saddam Hussein, the US disclaimed any interest in 'border disputes'. Had such a warning been issued it is more than likely that Saddam would have taken the hint. Had the US and Britain not pushed for immediate Arab League condemnation of the Iraqi invasion in the days immediately thereafter, King Hussein's arrangement for Iraqi withdrawal could have succeeded."

"None of the Iraqi proposals for settling the conflict diplomatically were unreasonable. If the US and its allies had seriously wanted to avoid war, any of the Iraqi proposals could have been the basis for further negotiations if they were not immediately acceptable....Washington's refusal to work for a diplomatic solution clearly demonstrates that it did not want a diplomatic solution. When George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker said that they had done all they could to avoid war *they were lying.* ★

Storms in the Indian Ocean

ON THE fringe of the Gulf crisis, the southern Indian Ocean is also experiencing upheavals. In this region — which contains countries such as South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion, the Comoros and the Seychelles — the great world events of recent years have brought their quota of political, economic and diplomatic change.

The present evolution underlines moreover the importance today of regional settlements. The southern Indian Ocean is a region where the South African question has had considerable importance. The political changes inside the apartheid state, together with French ambitions and the after-effects of the Gulf War, form the framework for a comprehensive reshuffling of the cards.

CLAUDE GABRIEL

THE great reform now underway in South Africa is making it possible to rapidly remove all the obstacles to normal trade between the countries of the region and their big neighbor. It is of no great interest to the former whether or not the internal negotiations in South Africa will really lead to the eradication of racial discrimination in that country.

Now that the European Community has given the green light for the lifting of sanctions, all the region's regimes feel freed from the last taboos against trade

with South Africa. But more important still is the fact that the economic reforms undertaken by Pretoria, supported by the great powers, would necessitate a reorganization of South African capitalism to attract a new wave of foreign investments.

Thus the possibility for South Africa to play a central role in the circulation of capital throughout the region depends also to an extent on the political decisions and good will of the neighboring states. The economic crisis in most of these countries has in any case made the process more or less unstoppable.

Despite the professions of anti-apartheid faith by the governments of the region, South Africa has long benefited from many forms of complicity and markets. But today the South African economy itself requires a qualitatively superior level of penetration of these markets, in order to create the commercial and financial outlets that must accompany the internal social and political reforms.

While South African industry has limited possibilities on the big European and American markets due to lack of competitiveness, it can, on the other hand, benefit from regional trade, which is underpinned by the country's political dominance in the region, and involves low transport costs.

However, while the region's governments do not need to be urged to respond to Pretoria's covert advances, the extent of the economic disaster in some of these countries presents objective obstacles to increased trade.

The region's two biggest countries, the Malagasy Republic and Mozambique, are economically exhausted and their states near to collapse. The Comoros have been in turmoil over the past year and the Seychelles have also been unstable. Goodwill on both sides is not enough. There is a need for external, effective, credible and ambitious supervision.

It seems that it is France that is bidding for the role of ringmaster, although Portugal remains important in Mozambique, and there is also, of course, the United States.

France remains the dominant power in the Malagasy Republic and the Comoros, plays a decisive role in Mauritius, and, because of its colonies — Réunion and Mayotte — it is considered as having a border on the Indian Ocean! Thus there is a kind of Franco-South African joint venture at work on the regional market — complementing what is being prepared for the south of the African continent.

The Malagasy Republic

The "Great Island" is today a country destroyed by corruption, bureaucracy and the incompetence of the so-called socialist regime of Didier Ratsiraka. The forma-

tion at the end of the 1970s of a national front bringing together all the country's political cliques has permitted a level of institutional stability.

But this front is nothing more in reality than a pact which allows each party to take its share of the rewards of administration. From the most "socialist" to the most liberal, each has contributed to the "Malagasy revolution" by putting their hands in the till.

In the end this happy compromise has come apart, leading to a new confrontation between a coalition tied to the regime and an opposition cartel, with a constitutional debate as the setting.

The protagonists remain the same but the rules of the game have been changed. The country's economy is bankrupt: Malagasy "socialism" has used and abused, for reasons of corruption, overblown industrial and agricultural projects.

The rural areas have been left to decay and in some regions there is famine. The regime, as with other similar regimes in Africa, maintained some ties to the West (above all France) while at the same time drawing on the good and loyal services of the Stalinist states. As a result the regime in Antananarivo found itself classified among the fraternal regimes with a socialist orientation.

Now, an accelerated liberalization has given many of the country's political notables, starting with the Ratsiraka family, the opportunity to put the money salted away over the years to work.

Privatizations and joint ventures link them with French and South African interests, as well as with some Japanese interests that Paris hopes to associate in mining projects.

Mauritius — the Small Dragon

Barely a decade ago, Mauritius' main resource was sugar cane cultivation, with tourism some way behind. But then the sugar economy was forced to adapt to the exigencies of the world market and the country's socio-economic panorama was thrown into upheaval.

At first sight, the successive governments, in receipt of good advice, have been able to weather the storm, with the rapid development of an industrial free trade zone and the offer of considerable privileges to foreign investors, starting with the French and the Hong Kong Chinese. The aim was to make of Mauritius a "small dragon", in the image of Taiwan or Singapore, in the southern Indian Ocean.

There is only 3% unemployment in Mauritius, and industry provides some 25% of Gross National Product. The sugar industry remains the main source of hard currency, but its share of GNP has fallen from over 30% in the 1960s to

11.3% today. There was 6.3% growth in 1990 with a per capita GNP of around \$2,100.

This transformation has taken place at the expense of the traditional workers' movement which was rooted in the sugar industry. Social relations and the make up of the working class have been rapidly changed, leading to a psychological earthquake. The independent left organizations now face the difficult task of rebuilding class consciousness.

Free trade zones are subject to a special kind of deterioration — the reduction in unemployment and the lack of qualified labour creates a pressure towards rising wages. Some employers then go looking elsewhere for new comparative advantages, in this case in the Malagasy Republic, where wage costs remain lower. Other enterprises in Mauritius, on the other hand, look towards more sophisticated forms of production.

All this means that the island is seeing the birth of a new social formation, and is currently in a transitional period. Political life, which had been largely determined by communal and racial divisions (Hindus, Tamils, Créoles, Muslims, Whites, Chinese) is changing fast.

This change does not mean that this colonial heritage is simply being left behind, but the system is becoming more complex and new class interests are super-imposed on it.

Mozambique

After more than ten years of war this country is in ruins. Agricultural production has not yet recovered to the level of the 1980s and the foreign debt is over \$4.2bn.

The effects of the war pursued by the South African-backed Renamo against the ruling Frelimo have been reinforced by the more specific effects of the regime's policies in areas as different as its relation with the rural masses, the functioning of the state, the establishment of mass organizations under party control and so on. Here, as elsewhere, a nationalist movement finding itself in power has attempted to build up a stable state and regime by copying Stalinist forms.

Today, Frelimo has abandoned "Marxism-Leninism" and is trying to combine negotiation with Renamo and liberalization of political and economic life.

The leading apparatus is splitting under the guise of establishing a multiparty system.

Here, too, internal reform also involves deeper regional integration, with the countries of the southern Indian Ocean on the one side and South Africa on the other.

The country has to be rebuilt and the total failure of the "Mozambican revolution" leaves no other way out than the

opening up of the country to imperialist and South African capital. There is no social force and no political leadership immediately available which could propose a way towards a real break with under-development and dependence¹.

South Africa — the regional power

These political and economic realignments come just at the right time to allow the South African economy to realize a part of the growth that it needs to underpin the constitutional reform programme.

The course of a few weeks has seen the opening of air routes with the Malagasy Republic and Kenya, the establishment of an official trade bureau in Mauritius, the announcement of projects in tourism in the Comoros and various investments in Mozambique.

The Tanzanian government (officially still in favour of sanctions against Pretoria) has signed an agreement with De Beers for the exploitation of diamond mines in the north of the country.

The Malagasy Republic's "revolutionary" and "socialist" president has even proposed that South Africa should be invited to the regional meetings. Here as elsewhere, tourism is a good means of getting into markets, since it involves a whole series of backup markets in the field of air transport and food importing. Thus the South African Karos group has invested in the renovation of a luxury hotel.

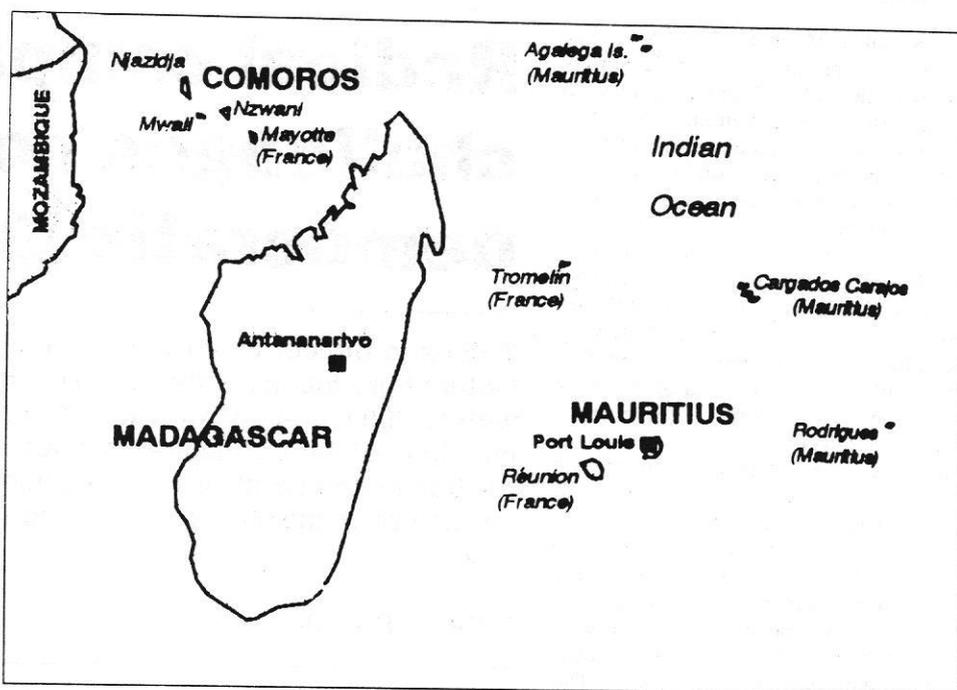
The Mozambican government is planning a series of joint ventures starting with the privatization of 31 enterprises. As in the Malagasy Republic the go-betweens in these operations are former political officials.

Finally, South Africa, having developed a hitech petro-chemical industry to ensure its independence in energy, is now in a position to become an exporter. The Comoros will get a South African loan to allow it to buy oil from the South African branches of Shell and Total.

The idea of exchanging Mauritian tea and sugar for South African crude, processed in the Malagasy Toamasina refinery, is also being seriously discussed. In exchange the Malagasy Republic will get the renovation of the refinery and a part of the processed oil.

Thus the movement is towards an increasingly integrated regional economy, where South Africa would act as the meeting ground for the southern Indian Ocean countries and those of southern Africa.

As far as the latter are concerned, in October 1990 the South African govern-



ment has already refloated, through its foreign affairs minister, the idea of a "regional Marshall Plan".

The oddest feature of the situation is that South Africa has already participated as an observer at a meeting of the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), which was originally set up to allow the countries of southern Africa to organize themselves independently of the South African economy.

Washington and of course Lisbon have been very active in this process. The Portuguese Socifa group has created a holding company for its specific operations aimed at its ex-colonies in Africa, while a new financial body, the Copor, has been set up to help Portuguese investors in these countries.

France — an Indian Ocean country

The main French possession in the region is Réunion Island, whose traditional colonial economic activity has also been sugarcane production.

In fact the country is on a drip feed, living off metropolitan subsidies. The island's trade balance shows the state of affairs: more than 10 billion French francs in imports and less than 1 billion in exports.

Réunion lives essentially from the income from public administration and social assistance. Nonetheless, the island has the virtue of making France a member of the Indian Ocean Commission (ICO) and allowing it to set up commercial and financial networks in the region. A part of Réunion's bourgeoisie invests in the Mauritian free trade zone, and the main air connections are ensured by French companies.

The structural dependence on aid, which allows among other things a relatively higher standard of living on Réunion than on the other islands, has had the effect of virtually wiping out any radical national consciousness. The demand for independence is supported only by a tiny minority.

However, social conflicts remain acute. Thus, at the end of February, when a pirate radio station was prohibited, there was something approaching an uprising of the island's youth from the poor quarters, lasting three days.

The good offices of Paris

A few months ago François Mitterrand visited the region. He made a number of the usual speeches about democracy, multipartyism and regional cooperation. In March French Prime Minister Michel Rocard arrived to represent Réunion at the ICO. Thus Paris is very busy capitalizing on the new international and regional situation, thanks to its toehold in Réunion.²

It was thus no surprise to see the main opposition force in Mauritius, the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM), being hoisted into government alongside its main enemy of recent years, the Mauri-

1. Indeed, there is now talk of installing South African farmers on the rich lands around the Pequenos Libombos dam, 40 miles from the Mozambican capital, Maputo, and in the state of Matola, a few kilometers from the capital.

2. The French are pushing hard for the establishment of a Francophone university in the Indian Ocean.

3. In the 1970s the MMM was the main popular and anti-imperialist opposition. It came to power in 1982 and split a few months after. The faction that stayed in government formed the MSM, while the rest of the MMM became again the opposition. After eight years spent denouncing the regime, the MMM leadership suddenly took the decision in 1990 to make an alliance with the MSM and join the government.

tian Socialist Movement (MSM)³. The thieves' compromise thus made simply expresses the political ambitions on both sides. This new government basically corresponds to the requirements of Paris and the South Africans for political stability in Mauritius favouring the new regional cooperation.

There are military implications as well; in November the French government announced the stepping up of military aid to the Comoros and the Malagasy Republic⁴. On December 1, 1990, a French officer became head of the army of the Comoros — supposedly an independent country.⁵

However, none of this will change the fundamental facts of dependence. Quite the opposite, given that the current developments will increase competition between the islands and worsen the development inequalities. If it gets off the ground, the Malagasy free trade zone will constitute a threat to some branches of the Mauritian industrial zone. The French have proposed to install farmers from Réunion and Mauritius in the Malagasy Republic, which will create a new social and national problem.

But there remains the old problem. It has always proved quite illusory to count on capitalist integration to create the conditions for a harmonious regional development. Investors get something out of it and the international institutions can pursue the rationalization of the markets.

But all this will resolve nothing as far as the deeper causes of underdevelopment and dependence in that region are concerned. In fact, economic integration in this region will be accompanied by growing French and South African dominance.

In the face of such developments there is an urgent need for the various independent union and political movements to work together. The basis for this should be the political and economic changes underway, which favour collaboration and solidarity in the most internationalized industries (tourism, textiles, garments and so on).

Such collaboration must have a radically anti-imperialist dimension, in favour of the solidarity of the peoples, for the departure of French and American military forces from the region and for total decolonization. ★

4. This region remains of global strategic importance. There are many Western military bases, in particular the American base at Diego Garcia, an island claimed by Mauritius, and the US satellite observation station on La Misère in the Seychelles. This base, which is controlled by the National Security Agency, played an important role in the Gulf war. Finally there are the French military bases on Réunion, Mayotte (in the Comoros) and Djibouti.

5. For countries such as Mauritius and the Seychelles, tuna fishing contracts are, furthermore, another significant link in the chain of dependence on the European Community countries, and thus in part on France.

Radical campaign challenges social democratic grip

THE car producer Volvo is the biggest company in Sweden. Its Gothenburg factory is the largest in the whole of Scandinavia, with 13,000 blue-collar workers. Over 90% of them are members of the metalworkers union. At the end of February the Social Democrats were challenged by a joint left opposition in the elections to the central leadership of the union.

DICK FORSLUND

THIS was an event which received wide coverage in the Swedish media. The social democrats have led the union since the 1950s. Their control is of strategic importance to the Swedish trade union bureaucracy.

A defeat in this election would be another symbol of a social democracy in crisis, beginning to lose its long term dominance in the Swedish labour movement.

But Volvo's Gothenburg factory is also important for the Swedish employers' federation. A good wage settlement at Volvo immediately reproduces itself throughout Swedish industry.

This would create new difficulties for the austerity policy of the Social Democratic government, with hundreds of thousands of public sector workers demanding similar agreements.

Thus both Swedish capitalism and social democracy needed a "responsible" leadership at Gothenburg. It was bound to be a big fight.

Campaign supported by a hundred workers

The left opposition went under the name of "Trade Union Independence" (TI). It was formed by a coalition of the Socialist Party (SP) and the Left Party (LP)¹. Around a hundred workers actively participated in the campaign.

The TI contested 85 union posts, from chairperson to local shop steward, and representation on the Gothenburg trade union council. Twenty of the candidates were members of one of the two parties.

The main slogan of the campaign was "No to a trade union loyal to the government's economic policy! Yes to a trade union loyal to the interests of its members!".

TI attacked the bureaucratic privileges of the fulltime officials and argued that union representatives should continue to work on the production line rather than disappearing into offices. It was pointed out that bureaucratic control of the Swedish trade union movement was beginning to alienate young workers in particular.

Today many workers question their membership in the union and ask why they should pay 2-3% of their wage in dues to an organization that cannot prove its usefulness. In this context the opposition demanded the right (which does not currently exist) for the workers to vote on contracts before they are signed by the union.

International fight against bosses needed

Volvo is a multinational company and the opposition raised the need for international cooperation between unions to counter the international plans of the bosses.

The candidates also raised the question of the worldwide crisis of car production, pointing out that collective transport is the wave of the future, while increasing production of cars destroys the environment.

The social democratic campaign concentrated on the experience of the old leadership. It portrayed the opposition as strike-happy militants who would not take

1. At their congress in May 1990 the Left Party of Communists (VPK) changed their name to the Left Party. This was to symbolize the party's break with its Stalinist past after the events in Eastern Europe. Since then a discussion has been going on in the LP about its history, programme and future role. One result of this debate has been the decision of some LP locals to open up their slates to non-members of the LP.

In the last parliamentary elections in Sweden the LP got 6.5% of the vote and 22 seats in parliament. The LP is one of six parties represented in parliament. The Socialist Party is the Swedish section of the Fourth International.



Socialist Party supporter Lars Henriksson, as portrayed in the propaganda of the Volvo social democrats

the future of Volvo into consideration.

It was claimed that the Volvo management would never engage in real negotiations with people who wanted revolution and that the opposition did not understand that negotiation also means making compromises.

Göte Kildén, a well known Socialist Party leader and TI candidate for chairperson, was attacked as power hungry and a Trotskyist. "This guy wants permanent revolution" was a headline repeated in the local newspapers.

The debate between Kildén and the main candidate of the social democrats, Olle Ludvigsson, started a month before the elections in local radio stations and newspapers. Both were interviewed in the national television news programme before the election.

A month before the election the factory management declared that redundancies were necessary and that 800 people had to be sacked because of heavy losses in the profitability of the company. The social democrats responded by proposing negotiations on who should stay and who should go.

Unity proposals refused

The opposition proposed instead a cut in working hours from 8 to 7 hours with no loss of pay and argued that Volvo, after 10 years of fat profits, could pay for this without problems. They asked the social democrats for a truce and a united response against the bosses, but this was refused.

The company's threats were well timed for the elections. They favoured the social democratic campaign, so heavily centred around the old leadership's ability to negotiate. The social democrats now argued that they could use their long record of mutual confidence with Volvo in the best interests of the workers.

This is however only one explanation of the final result of the election in which the social democrats won 66% of the vote, against 34% for the TI slate (on an unusually high turnout of 60%).

Speaking to the Socialist Party's weekly newspaper *Internationalen*, Göte Kildén said that the election showed that the social democrats still had the confidence of the majority on the shop floor. However, a close analysis of the results from each factory

department underlined the importance of having support in every area in order to win; without that, it was very difficult to beat the social democratic apparatus.

The social democrats had around 400 people assigned on different trade union responsibilities. Paid by their party, they could canvass without loss of pay on the two days prior to the elections.

The supporters of the TI slate had to punch out and lose 1400 s.kr. per person to do the same.

The budget of the social democratic campaign came from party funds and amounted to 400,000 s.kr. while the campaign budget of the opposition was 30,000 s. kr. and was collected by sympathizers in the factory.

Opposition puts question of power on agenda

Kildén said that the social democrats had put such a huge effort in because the TI campaign had put the question of power over the union on the agenda.

"I think that their huge effort is the main reason for this result. We underestimated their enormous strength in some parts of the factory and did not realize fully how fragile our own organization is in those places..."

"We really tried to win and I must admit that we are a bit disappointed. Many of us had anticipated getting at least around 45% of the votes".

Lars Henriksson, another TI supporter, gives a picture of the reality of the campaign on some of the big assembly lines where both average age and trade union activity is low.

In such places, where there were few TI activists present, the social democrats won easily.

The social democrat campaigning style involved two trade union fulltimers

approaching workers individually and taking them to vote.

"Then a walk to the ballot ('Don't take any other papers and don't talk to anyone') where three social democrats and someone from the opposition are standing. At the ballot 'Don't talk to that guy. He's a communist'. 'Hey, are there two slates?! Well...'

"Then vote. Then back to the assembly line and the two appointed fulltimers guide the next worker to the ballot".

In places where the opposition was strong or radicals had controlled the local union club for some time, the result was 50/50 or victory for the opposition.

This was the case with the Lundby lorry factory where Kildén is the chairperson of the local club. Here TI got 73% of the votes.

Kildén explained that the Gulf war and its coverage in the media also had an effect on the results.

"We had some comrades with Arab names on our slate. I could see how some workers wrote "Arab scum" or "Saddam" on the slate of TI before they threw them away.

"Anyway every third Volvo worker supported our campaign and I think it is an investment for the future. We'll be back for sure! I also want to point to the good cooperation with the members of the Left Party which is a new thing at Volvo".

SP member on parliamentary slate

This cooperation between trades unionists from the LP and the SP was confirmed three weeks later.

At the LP nominating conference in Gothenburg, a large majority of delegates voted in favour of placing Göte Kildén in third place on the LP slate for this autumn's Swedish parliamentary election, despite the fact that he is a well known member of the SP.

At present the LP has two MPs from Gothenburg in parliament, and a good result for the slate would mean the small SP getting representation in the Swedish parliament for the first time.

A leader of the Gothenburg LP told the press after the conference that, even if Kildén was not elected, he would abstain and let him take his place in parliament when working class issues were on the agenda.

A minority at the conference attacked the alliance with the SP, arguing that the LP was opening itself to the extreme left, and would isolate itself in national politics.

A Volvo worker argued against this; "The alliance of the left at Volvo gave an opportunity for us, members of the LP at the Volvo plant, to wake up after being asleep for ten years.

"I will be ashamed in my work in the trade union if we don't give third place in our slate in the coming election to Göte Kildén". ★

Free Kuwait

ON MARCH 14, the Emir of Kuwait finally returned to his country, two weeks after the "liberation" of his principality by the American forces. No doubt he would have preferred to wait for one of his numerous marble, gold and crystal palaces to be repaired and law and order thoroughly reestablished. But faced with criticism from all sides, the Emir felt obliged to curtail his gilded exile in Saudi Arabia.

SALAH JABER

ACTING under the friendly supervision of the United States ambassador, now High Commissioner of this new American colony, the ruling family of the As-Sabahs has set about restoring its regime and rebuilding war-torn Kuwait. The first object of the ruling caste has not been the reestablishment of essential services and the relief of the population that stayed in the Emirate under extremely difficult conditions. It has, of course, been the restoration of the prewar order, as a fruit of the new order of George Bush.

From this point of view the two main problems are, on the one hand, the post-war political regime, and on the other, the make-up of the population. The ruling dynasty had never shown much respect for the apology for democracy conceded in 1962, on British advice, to the rich opposition.

Of the 700 to 800,000 Kuwaiti citizens, who form about 40% of the emirate's population, less than 10% have the right to vote. Profoundly reactionary criteria exclude women and those whose Kuwaiti citizenship dates from after 1920. Even so, the emir and his many brothers found the parliament, wherein the liberal or nationalist bourgeoisie questioned their monopoly on power and their privileges, an irritation.

In exasperation, the emir dissolved the recalcitrant assembly in 1986 and suspended the constitution. Today the opposition — businessmen, members of the liberal professions and religious leaders — are speaking up, blaming the incompetence of the As-Sabahs for the disaster which overtook Kuwait. They have been protesting energetically against the government's imposition of martial law and demanding the setting of a date for new elections. The reaction of the ruling family was not long in coming: soon after the

"liberation" a commando tried to assassinate an ex-deputy who was distinguished by his criticisms of the As-Sabahs' financial extravagances.

A climate of repressive terror is being progressively installed in the Emirate, in the framework of martial law. The regime's armed forces, who have returned with the barons, have set about disarming the population that stayed in Kuwait under the Iraqi occupation and who have seized the arms abandoned by the Iraqi soldiers.

The men and women of Kuwaiti citizenship who stayed behind — less than a third of the total number of Kuwaitis and the same in number as the Palestinians who remained — are usually those least able to afford a comfortable exile. A large part of them, perhaps the majority, belong to the Shi'ite minority (40%), an oppressed section of the Kuwaiti population. They are also demanding the right to oversee the affairs of the state, considering themselves to have won more legitimacy than the exiles. Kuwaiti women, who, paradoxically, have probably never been so free as under the Iraqi occupation, have also been demanding their emancipation and the right to vote.

Palestinians made into scapegoats

Faced with this wave of criticism, the restored regime is combining repression and division. Under the heading "repression", the country's only newspaper, which was launched by the "resistance" even before the Iraqi withdrawal, was shut down on March 19 for criticizing the government. Under "divide and rule" the Palestinians are being made scapegoats, accused, above all by Kuwaitis who have returned from exile, of collaboration with the Iraqi occupation.

It is true that a sizeable section of the community of Palestinian origin — 400 to 500,000 people, including many who were born in Kuwait or have lived there for decades — showed sympathy, at least at the beginning, for an invasion from which they could only hope for an improvement in their situation.

Subsequently, and faced with the appalling behaviour

of Baghdad's troops, opinion among Kuwaiti Palestinians swung round. More than half of them fled the country in the direction of Jordan.

The great majority of these can hardly hope to return: the Kuwaiti regime is not only planning to prevent those non-natives who left from returning, but to expel those who have stayed. The Kuwaiti Palestinians are thus now being subjected to a treatment half way between what they have undergone in the Christian areas of Lebanon and what they suffer under the Israeli occupation. The Kuwaiti officials are openly talking about only allowing some tens of thousands of Palestinians to stay in their territory.

The regime is intending to drastically reduce the size of the non-native population of the Emirate, so that the majority of the inhabitants should henceforth be composed of Kuwaitis and beneficiaries of oil rent. The plan is to replace labour with modern technology. For tasks which require a knowledge of Arabic, Palestinians will be replaced by Egyptians in recognition of the Egyptian government's role in the crisis.

For the rest, and notably for domestic labour — there were 500,000 domestics in Kuwait before the invasion, that is, 25% of the total population — the Emirate will continue to favour recruits from south and south-east Asia, who can be exploited mercilessly and have no intention to stay permanently in the Gulf.

Kuwait is an artificial state, firstly and above all in its social structure, where most of the native population is privileged or simply parasitic (a third of Kuwaiti males have no job), living from vast oil revenues. This population enslaves and exploits a majority of "immigrants", who the sheikhs have now promised to reduce to a minority. ★



Solidarity with Algerian women!

AN appeal for solidarity with Algerian women was adopted by the 13th World Congress of the Fourth International which was held in February this year (see report in IV 202):

THE Intifada of October 5, 1988 allowed the workers, the youth, women and all the popular masses to express and organize themselves, but the rise of fundamentalism threatens these liberties which were so dearly paid for.

Preoccupied by its opening to the world market, the Algerian regime, which has multiplied the obstacles placed in the path of the democratic movements, has shown extraordinary complacency in the face of fundamentalist attacks against non-Islamic meetings, and limitless tolerance of violence against women. It has accepted without any action Islamic militia laying siege to university students' residences.

The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) threatens the few gains made by Algerian women and enjoys the support of the consensus in Algeria's patriarchal society. In this country, the Family Code of 1984 obliges a woman to have a guardian in order to marry, enjoins obedience to the husband and his family, makes divorce almost impossible, ensures loss of children in case of re-marriage and so on.

Women hold only 4% of jobs, but the fundamentalists are still attacking women's right to work. They attack co-education and male and female employees are kept apart in town halls under fundamentalist control. In fact, women's right to study and to move around freely without wearing *hidjab* (the veil) are under threat.

Women have reacted with courage. They have formed associations, have demonstrated against the violence and against the threats to their jobs and their right to study. They have denounced the electoral law which allows enemies of women to vote on their behalf by proxy.

They have been treated as agents of "the party of France", "the cats' paws of colonialism". Nonetheless 4,000 demonstrated on March 8, 1989 and 20,000 on March 8, 1990. They are building, through an inclusive coordinating body, a big united movement with the *Mudjahidates* — women who fought in the national liberation struggle.

While the defenders of the most retro-

Continued from page 28

giving an account of the commission's findings will be presented at a public meeting at the end of May or the start of June; information will be made available to the press and interested associations from April onwards, through public testimonies, and in time through a bulletin that at each stage will present the facts as established by the inquiry.

The "sponsorship committee" is not intended to be a sort of "supreme antiwar movement". Its purpose is to ensure the largest possible diffusion of the commission's results.

Every movement or association will retain its independence to continue its activities. But all are united on one common demand: "The truth about the war, the truth about the massacre."

— Alain Mathieu

"We have decided to create a Commission of Inquiry"

"DURING the weeks of the war, the hundreds of thousands of tons of bombs poured down on Iraq and Kuwait were accompanied by just as many lies poured out of the media. The military censorship and the manipulation of opinion have reached new heights in the history of falsification using modern means of communication. According to AFP, the American authorities have recognized that: 'they had to a certain extent manipulated their own media in order to deceive the Iraqis.' But it was not only the Iraqis that were deceived, but public opinion throughout the world.

"The real causes of the war have been hidden from the eyes of the world:

- How many Iraqi soldiers and civilians were killed during the 40 days of intensive bombing?
- What type of arms were used by the coalition armies — were napalm, vacuum bombs or fragmentation bombs used?
- What really happened on the highway from Kuwait City to Basra as thousands of civilians and soldiers fled back to Iraq?
- Why is the embargo being maintained when Iraq has a greater than ever need for drugs, provisions and the means to reconstruct their devastated country?
- What have been the ecological effects?
- What is the balance-sheet of the attacks on liberties in France, as a consequence of the plan "Vigipirate."
- What have been the real costs of this massacre, who has profited from it, at a time when the Third World is crushed under the weight of the debt?
- And now, what is happening to the Palestinians in Kuwait? And what about the repression that Saddam Hussein is now undertaking against the Kurdish and Iraqi peoples?
- What really happened in Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion on August 2, 1990?

"Public opinion has been the victim of a gigantic bluff.

"We, who participated in the different movements opposed to the war, now commit ourselves to seeking the truth about this war. We call for the bringing together of all the suppressed evidence, the accounts of civilians who lived through the war, the Western soldiers who saw it, the journalists who were censored. To this end we have decided to create a commission of enquiry to gather together these accounts, and to make public at a united public meeting the reality of the massacre."

The initial signatures to this appeal have established a sponsoring committee for the commission of enquiry, which can be contacted at: "Collectif pour la vérité", 33, rue du Faubourg-Saint-Antoine, 75011, Paris, France.

The commission of enquiry itself, composed of 15 independent personalities, appeals for witnesses to come forward. It can be contacted at: Maître Dominique Tricaud, 9, avenue Hoche, 75008, Paris, France, tel: (Paris) 49 53 00 55. ★

grade projects today have at their disposal the most sophisticated means of propaganda, the women do not have any way of producing any leaflet of appeal.

Algerian women are in danger! Only a few more months remain for them to get

organized before the forthcoming legislative elections, which the fundamentalists hope to win.

Algerian women need our material and political solidarity! ★

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Finding the truth about the war

A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY into the truth about the Gulf War has been launched in France.

The appeal for the commission is not signed by organizations, but by individuals. However the three main currents in the French antiwar movement, the Appeal of the 75, Peace Now and the Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East are circulating the appeal, and leading members of these groups have signed it.

Other signatures come from members of the French Communist Party (PCF), the Communist Youth (JC), the General Workers Confederation (CGT), SOS-Racisme, the radical students union, the UNEF-id, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR — French section of the Fourth International), the Greens and immigrant and anti-racist organizations.

We publish below the appeal and an introduction to its work that appeared in the French socialist weekly, *Rouge*, in its issue of March 28, 1991.

ROUGE

ON MARCH 27, 1991, the appeal which we publish below was made public. It has been supported by a wide cross-section of personalities who took part in the antiwar movement in France. It involves many of those who signed the "appeal of the 75", along with supporters of "Peace Now" and the "Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East", as well as representatives of associations of immigrants from the Arab countries.

The idea of commissions of inquiry or "white books" to establish the truth about the war has taken root with all those who were not taken in by the gigantic manipulation aimed at hiding the reality of the massacre. The objective of this appeal is to bring together all interested forces for a joint commission of inquiry.

An initial meeting of the signatories has mapped out a number of initiatives: the setting up of a commission of inquiry composed of personalities, jurists, doctors, journalists and writers; a white book

A sinister resolution

THE resolution adopted on April 3 by the United Nation's Security Council with 12 votes for (including the unanimous vote of the Great Powers), two abstentions and one against (Cuba) — is probably the most outrageous ever approved by this body. Even from the most formal point of view, it is worse than the one which permitted the use of force to remove Iraq from Kuwait.

SALAH JABER

IN FACT, the new resolution contains several innovations in the field of inter-state relations, as covered by "international legality". First of all, it is explicitly a diktat, since there will only be a formal ceasefire and a withdrawal of the troops occupying southern Iraq if this latter country submits to all the conditions laid out in the resolution.

These are draconian: Iraq must accept unconditionally under international supervision the destruction and removal of all chemical and biological weapons, material usable in nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers and related parts, repair and production facilities. Moreover, a total arms embargo is to be maintained against Iraq, to be reviewed after 120 days.

Even Egypt, one of the most prominent members in the anti-Iraqi coalition, felt obliged to protest against these clauses, whose iniquity is blatant in a region where several states, and above all Israel, possess "non-conventional" weapons. Israel in fact has more of them than all its near and distant neighbours put together, including a hundred nuclear warheads (according to American information) and the Jericho missiles, which are a lot more efficient than the Iraqi Scuds.

These conditions in the resolution have nothing to do with the "liberation" of Kuwait. The pure and simple aim is to achieve the elimination of Iraq's strategic capabilities, to prevent them being restored in the foreseeable future and in this way guarantee the Zionist state's regional supremacy and the security of the oil monarchies tied to Washington.

The diktat is not directed against Sad-



dam Hussein but against Iraq as such, a point made recently by a leader of the Iraqi Communist Party:

"What the Iraqi opposition finds most worrying is the United States' attitude... (Their) objective seems to be for the moment to get as many concessions as possible out of Saddam Hussein, concessions which will...be binding on the Baghdad dictator's successors. In sum, the Americans are not only seeking to punish Saddam Hussein, but any government that may succeed him; they will be obliged to accept American hegemony throughout the region" (*Le Monde*, March 29, 1991).

Reparations to be levied on oil revenues

Iraq is also to pay reparations to Kuwait, although the latter country is much richer than the former. These will be levied by force on Iraqi oil exports; a percentage (as yet to be fixed) of the income of these exports will be placed in a fund under the management of an ad hoc commission. The comparison between these pro-Kuwaiti measures and the absence of any reparations for Iran in the 1988 resolution that put an end to the Iran/Iraq war speaks volumes.

The embargo on Iraqi exports will only be lifted after Iraqi "non-conventional" weapons have been done away with and the compensation mechanism is in working order. This is extortion on threat of strangulation. Furthermore, the Security Council has taken it upon itself to fix the border between Iraq and Kuwait, instead of submitting the issue to a body such as the International Court in The Hague.

Meanwhile *the massacre of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs by Saddam Hussein's army is not even mentioned.*

The adoption of such a resolution, which even its principal sponsor, the American ambassador, has described as "tough but fair", should clear up any illusions as to "arbitration" by the Security Council or the Great Powers assembled under American hegemony. To believe that the one or the other is going to find a "just" solution to the Palestinian question is at best a sign of naivety bordering on stupidity. ★